Mrs. Dobbs' Dull Boy

MRS. DOBBS' DULL BOY.

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"A picture. Why, bless my heart, Frank, it's your grandfather!"

Frontispiece. *Page* 101.

MRS. DOBBS' DULL BOY.

BY

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

An Eminently Genteel Family 5

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Martin's Arrival 20

CHAPTER III.

A Straight Line 34

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. Martin's Departure 47

CHAPTER V.

Jem's First Situation 60

CHAPTER VI.

Treasure Trove 76

CHAPTER VII.

A Friend in Need 97

CHAPTER VIII.

Poor Little Dolly 115

2131144

CHAPTER IX.

PAGE

How the Crash Came 132

CHAPTER X.

Two Ways of Beginning the World..... 146

CHAPTER XI.

Jem's Promotion..... 157

CHAPTER XII.

Jem's Second Situation..... 169

CHAPTER XIII.

"All Work and no Play, just as bad for Jill as for Jack"..... 183

CHAPTER XIV.

Agatha to the Rescue..... 196

CHAPTER XV.

Mr. Barlow's Gate-Keeper 208

CHAPTER XVI.

A Quiet Mind..... 225

CHAPTER XVII.

"And this is Jem!"..... 231

CHAPTER XVIII.

How Jem and Dolly Parted at Last..... 244

MRS. DOBBS' DULL BOY.

CHAPTER I.

AN EMINENTLY GENTEEL FAMILY.

R. and Mrs. Dobbs had three sons and three daughters: and I may state on the best authority (for surely a mother ought to know her own children) that every individual son and daughter was uncommonly clever, save one.

That one was Jem, the dull boy. The young Dobbses were more than clever (I still speak on the best authority). They were equally remarkable for personal beauty as for mental endowments; and above all, as Mrs. Dobbs was never weary of adding, they were "eminently genteel." Genteel is a word selected by Mrs. Dobbs, not by me. It is not a favourite of mine. It always implies, to my ear, a certain amount of sham and pretension, but Mrs. Dobbs believed in being genteel, worshipped genteel people, and would

not, I think, have allowed herself to be happy in the Garden of Eden, unless she had been assured that it was a genteel resort.

Time had been when Mr. and Mrs. Dobbs were by no means as genteel as they were when my story opens. They began life in a very small way. Mr. Dobbs was clerk (some unkind people said plainly, shopman) in a great grocery establishment in the rising town of Middlemore, and in those days he was a hard-working, thriving man, and his pretty wife (she was an Irishwoman) seemed very busy and happy among her six children. But a distant relation having left Mr. Dobbs a small sum of money, he determined to risk it in one of those wonderful speculations of which every age has plenty, and being a shrewd man, he prospered beyond his expectation. He continued to speculate, and continued to prosper. The grocery line was given up, and Mr. Dobbs had an office in a good street in Middlemore and a pretty house in the suburbs. It was then that Mrs. Dobbs began to be genteel, and as wealth increased, so did her gentility, and that of her children, or, at least, of most of her children. For if Jem was the dull boy of the family, Dolly was undoubtedly the least genteel girl.

When the two elder girls grew up, Mrs. Dobbs determined that they should make splendid marriages; and to this end she wished to get into good society. So she insisted on moving to a large and handsome house, just outside the town, which she furnished in the most magnificent manner. There were also gardens, greenhouses, hot-houses, croquet ground, and cricket ground, and yet it was within easy

distance of the shops in which the mother and daughters delighted, and of the billiard-rooms and other places of resort affected by the young gentlemen. There was one great blessing connected with Middlemore, Mrs. Dobbs would remark: there were always plenty of soldiers to make the streets look gay, and plenty of officers to dine, play croquet, and dance at Ballydobbs House, as Mrs. Dobbs had named her new abode—thus combining the family name with an Irish sound very pleasingly. She was wont to declare that she belonged to a "very genteel family" in Ireland, and she called one of her sons Fitzgerald De Courcy, so that you might take your choice between these two, and decide whether she had been a Miss Fitzgerald or a Miss De Courcy (or both) at your leisure. Your decision would never have been challenged by Mrs. Dobbs, though in truth her maiden name had been Leary. I beg that no one will imagine me to imply that there is any disgrace in bearing a name less euphonious than De Courcy or Fitzgerald—I am not such a snob. The disgrace lies in being ashamed of it.

The Dobbs family was at tea. Five o'clock tea, need I say; and I am to be understood as speaking generally, and not as implying that every member of the family was present. However, there was a goodly assemblage, and on the whole, the young people justified their mother's pride in them. The eldest girl, Miranda, was singing a wonderfully genteel little song, and considering that she had not learned to play or sing until she was sixteen, she was doing it very well. Up to nearly the same period of her life too, she had answered to the name of Mary Anne; but at

that juncture increasing gentility had occasioned a general revision of the names of the family. It was then that Tom became Fitzgerald; Mary Anne, by an easy alteration, Miranda; while Bess (she had been baptized Bess after Mr. Dobbs' stepmother, of whom you will hear presently) selected Belinda as a substitute; and little Dorothea was dubbed Theodora. However, when Dolly arrived at years of discretion, she shocked the others sadly by refusing to be Theodora; but they were obliged to submit, for she had a sharp tongue, and threatened to bring them to confusion by using their original names "before company" unless they let her have her own way about Dolly. They called her Dorothea, however, and with this she had to be content. Besides these, there was another son, whose plain Harry had been sublimed into Harcourt.

While Miranda sang, Belinda bent over an embroidery frame, and worked, not very industriously, at a "flower-piece" of great size and curiously blended colour. Dorothea was dispensing tea (dear me! how society of this kind refines one. I generally say "pouring out tea"), Fitz lounged gracefully in an arm-chair, and James, poor stupid James (with whose name no one cared to meddle), sat in the window with a book in his hand. Miranda was really a pretty girl; Belinda had a fine complexion, Dolly had a round, merry face, with dark eyes and a bright colour. She was the youngest of the family, and consequently the best educated, having really learned many things which her sisters only pretended to know. Fitz was handsome, but James was a plain, thick-set, rather heavy-looking lad, and though he had naturally a particularly pleasant smile and a pair of honest,

sensible grey eyes, he was so shy that most people set him down as a very plain dull boy. He was the youngest son and Dolly was the youngest child. Dolly was Jem's only friend. She loved him, fought his battles, revenged the insults offered him by the others, and was really kind to him; though sometimes it was doubtful that she added to his happiness by her rather pugnacious championship; for Jem was a quiet, retiring lad, and did not like a fuss even when it was made in his own defence.

Mrs. Dobbs (for I must complete my picture of the tea-drinking party) lay on a sofa; a right fair, delicate, pretty, silly-looking little woman as could well be. Dolly prepared and carried to her a cup of tea and a slice of thin bread and butter, and having placed them on a small table close at hand, she said—

"Do sit up and eat something, Mother. You did not eat a bit of luncheon to-day."

"My child!" faintly exclaimed Mrs. Dobbs, "Mamma, I beg—not Mother. So low!"

"Oh, I'll call you anything you like if you'll only eat. Here Jem, dear, here is your tea."

She held out a cup, and Jem stretched forth a long arm and took it. Fitz raised his head, and said, "Any tea for me, little one?"

"Certainly—ready for you."

"The little vixen means to make me get up and come for it," said Fitz, good-humouredly; and, stretching himself lazily, he came over to the table, and took possession of a cup. Miranda's song had come to an end, but she was still at the piano.

"Mamma," said she, "do I know that song well enough to sing it to-night?"

"No, you don't," answered Belinda; "you had better have another lesson in it before you sing it in company."

"I daresay you are right," answered Miranda. "Has it stopped raining? It is so provoking, for Mr. Lawson and Major Douglas said they would come this afternoon—evening I mean—for a little croquet."

"I wish your papa and Harcourt would come in before the tea is cold," sighed Mrs. Dobbs; and as if her wish had been a fairy wish, a knock was heard at the door.

"Is that Papa, Jem, dear?" said Dolly. James nodded in reply with such unnecessary vehemence that his cup jumped off the saucer and was broken in the fall. Mrs. Dobbs, Miranda, and Belinda, all three thought it right to scream faintly.

"O James, you dull creature! O my poor head!" said his mother.

"Jem, can't you move without upsetting something?" asked Fitz, laughing.

"It is enough to ruin one's nerves to sit in the room with him," murmured Miranda.

"Another cup smashed," said the more decided tones of Belinda.

James grew crimson, and the bereaved saucer trembled in his grasp. Dolly took it from him, gathered up the pieces of the cup, and while thus employed, remarked, "Good people, you make as much fuss about a tea-cup as if it were an heirloom from some of our noble ancestors, English or Irish."

Now, no one desired to set Dolly's sharp tongue going on that subject, so the fate of the tea-cup was

passed over without further remark; and presently Mr. Dobbs and his son Harcourt entered the room together.

Mr. Dobbs had been, in his youth, a handsome, portly man; and he was portly still, but it was strange that no one had remarked how careworn and old he was beginning to look. Harcourt had only just come back from his tutor's—he was reading with the curate of the parish to prepare himself for Oxford, and eventually for Holy Orders, because, as his mother said, "the Church was such a genteel profession."

Mr. Dobbs had a letter in his hand, which he laid aside to take the cup of tea which Dolly gave him, and which he really seemed to need, as he was very pale. They were all drinking tea, eating cake, and chattering, when Mrs. Dobbs said—

"Mr. Dobbs, my dear, there was an Australian letter for you. Did you get it? A—um—Have you received it?"

Mrs. Dobbs seldom used a familiar phrase without correcting herself.

"Yes, I have it here. It is from my stepmother. Here, Dolly, take my cup. I want both my hands to break this great seal."

He spoke with forced playfulness, but his hands shook as he opened the letter, and his eyes betrayed a great deal of anxiety as he began to read. Anxiety which changed first to disappointment and then to dismay, mingled with a half-amused smile as he looked at his wife.

"She is coming home on a visit, Mary," said he.

They were all talking, but his voice and manner attracted general attention.

"Who is coming home?" they inquired, not having heard his words distinctly.

"My stepmother," replied Mr. Dobbs, briefly.

Mrs. Dobbs sprang up from the sofa with a degree of energy which she seldom displayed, and exclaimed—

"Your stepmother, Tom! Do you mean to say she is coming here?"

Fitz whistled, and Miranda burst into tears.

"What's the matter?" Dolly whispered to Jem; but he was as much puzzled as she was. The elder ones appeared to understand the calamity that threatened the family.

"Good gracious, Tom! what *ever* is to be done?" Mrs. Dobbs went on, quite forgetting to choose long words in her agitation. "Write at once, and say she can't come."

"I could not do that, Mary."

"And why not, pray?"

"Because I have not forgotten what I owe her; though you seem to have forgotten that she was very kind to you and the children. When my father died, and left me to her care, there was not a penny in the world to educate me or start me in life. Her son—mind you, though I call him brother, he is no relation to me—he is her son by her first marriage—he was earning twenty-five shillings a week, and that was all she had to look to. Most people would have sent me to the workhouse, but she kept me, educated me, apprenticed me, and was my best friend, ay, and yours too, Mary, until they all went to Australia. I could no more tell her that she can't come to my house because my wife and children have grown too fine to

talk to her than I could fly; so say no more about it. Besides there is not time—she has sailed before now."

Mr. Dobbs was not a great talker as a general rule, but when he did talk in this way his wife knew that he meant to be attended to; so, beyond a faint moan when he used such low expressions as the "workhouse," and "apprenticed me," her gentility remained, as it were, dormant. Miranda ceased to weep, and only looked sulky. Dolly was full of curiosity. Neither she nor James could remember the hard-working, struggling times of old, and she, at least, had had no idea of the very humble origin of her parents until now. Perhaps the fact that she was not in the least shocked when she gathered the truth from what her father said, proved that her sisters were right when they asserted that "Dorothea was naturally ungenteel."

"Papa," she said, "tell me about her. She is not our grandmother then?"

"No. She married my father—my own mother died when I was a baby. She was a widow with one son—a boy many years older than I was. She's as good a woman as walks this earth; I only wish there were more like her;" and Mr. Dobbs sighed heavily. Mrs. Dobbs hid her face in her handkerchief, and moaned feebly.

"If you wanted a coarse, bustling kind of wife, Mr. Dobbs, my dear, you should not have married me."

"So it seems," he answered drily. "Come with me, Mary; I want to speak to you."

They left the room together, and went downstairs

to a small apartment which was given up to the master of the house, and which was the only spot in his fine house where he felt at home. What passed between them there the young people, of course, did not know; but I shall take this opportunity to enlighten my readers on one or two matters concerning which they had some discussion.

About two years before this time, Mr. Dobbs had lost heavily in an unfortunate speculation. In order to prevent this loss from being known, he had applied to Stephen Martin, his stepmother's son, for a loan, and had got it at once. Mr. Dobbs expected to be able to repay this money very soon, and was very regular in paying the interest; but things had not gone well with him of late, and with such an extravagant wife and family, he was becoming seriously embarrassed. Some time ago he had taken his wife into his confidence, urging her to retrench the household expenditure, to give fewer parties, dress herself and her daughters less expensively, and buy no more useless knicknacks to fill her already overcrowded drawing-room. But she assured him that such a course would ruin everything. They were now in the *best* society; Mirrie and Linda were greatly admired, and were certain to make good matches soon; Fitz was "all but" engaged to Miss Darwin, who had five thousand a year if she had a penny, and who would, no doubt, provide for Harcourt, as she had a living in her gift; and all these brilliant prospects would fade away in a moment if he raised the least suspicion that he was no longer the prosperous and successful man he had been, besides, she declared that the economies he suggested were not enough to make any serious

difference; and furthermore, she prophecied that his luck would soon turn, and then he would laugh at his present anxiety. Her advice to him was to write to Stephen Martin and borrow a sum of money to meet the present difficulty. Mr. Dobbs let himself be persuaded, and wrote the letter. But whether he unintentionally betrayed too much anxiety, or for some other reason, the result was that old Mrs. Dobbs was coming to England, and whether she was bringing the money with her or not her letter did not state.

"It is so provoking that she must needs make a mystery of it!" said Mrs. Dobbs, when she had read the letter.

"I don't see that it matters whether she brings it or not, Mary; we shan't get it. Mother is a shrewd woman—as shrewd a woman as I know—and I couldn't tell her a lie neither."

"Tell her a lie! My dear Tom, what a low expression! Who wants you to tell her a lie? It is certainly a great pity that she is coming, for her old-fashioned dress and homely ways will set people laughing, I am afraid; but that must be borne. It will be all right, you'll find. You just hold your tongue; if she questions you, say that your business is not one that you can explain, you know, and leave the rest to me. When she sees the style in which we live, and the people who visit us, she'll take it for granted that your business is all right."

"I doubt it."

"It will be your fault, then, if she don't. I'll do my part. I'll see that everything goes right. Miranda and Belinda will help me—they are really such clever girls."

"Little Dolly's worth six of them. Mind you, Mary, don't tell any of the young people that there is anything wrong; you never can reckon on what young folk will do. Either they'd confide it to some dear friend, or else they'd take fright and want to do something that would betray us. Yes, your plan is the only one now; we must have that money if we can get it."

"Stephen Martin is so fond of you."

"Yes, but he has seven girls to provide for."

"Well, you 'll repay him with interest. It will be the best investment he could make; mind you tell this old woman so. And now I'll go upstairs again and lecture the young people. They really must be civil to her."

On her way upstairs she heard shouts of laughter, which she soon found were occasioned by Dolly, who, with a muslin "tidy" folded to represent a cap, a square of bright wool-work pinned over her shoulders as a small shawl, her gown tucked up, and the poker in her hand as a stick, was giving a spirited lecture on the family idleness, dress, gaiety, etc., in the character of "Grandmamma Bess" whom she had never seen, but concerning whom she had been catechising the elder ones who remembered her.

"Dorothea, I'm surprised at you!" said Mrs. Dobbs, severely. "It is very low—very ungenteel—to mimic people."

"One can hardly call it mimicking, Mamma, as I never saw the old dame. I only got Miranda to describe her to me."

"O Mamma, can nothing be done to keep her away?" said Belinda. "It 's too horrid. Why, she

was housekeeper to Miss Darwin's uncle before she married our grandfather, and that 's enough to make it horrid ; besides, of course she 'll call us all by our old names."

"I dont think she will, my dear, if I request her not to do so. She was always a most obliging person, and I think she will understand that under present circumstances, the names which—which—might once have been tolerated, will not do—are in fact unsuitable."

"I would rather be Tom than Fitz," said Dolly, audaciously. "Fits of what ? laughing, or coughing, eh ?"

"Hold your tongue, Dolly," said Mrs. Dobbs, angrily. "You are very saucy and very silly, and your opinion was not asked. Really, children, we must be civil to the old creature. Your papa has business relations with her son, who is enormously rich, and if we vex her she may do him a mischief."

"And I daresay she 's a very nice old trot," cried the unabashed Dolly.

However, nothing that any one could say prevailed to make the four elders leave off bewailing the horrors of grandmamma Dobbs' impending visit. Dolly did nothing but laugh and ask questions, and James sat in the window and said nothing. No one noticed this ; it was just Jem's dull way ; and if dull Jem privately speculated as to the reason of his mother's sudden change of opinion, he said nothing of that either, even to Dolly.

There was a party at Ballydobbs House that night, and Miss Darwin was there, and smiled graciously upon handsome, good-tempered Fitz. Miranda sang

a song—not that which had been said to require further polishing—and Belinda sang another song, and there was plenty of dancing. Dolly, though still considered as a child, was present, and enjoyed herself heartily, more than either of her sisters did; for she just danced and laughed and chattered, and had no secret plans to fret her, nor any desire to appear other than she was, which is more than I can say for Miranda and Belinda. And Mrs. Dobbs was very genteel; so indeed was the whole entertainment, only Mr. Dobbs sat alone in his den downstairs, and groaned when the music and laughter reached his ears, and did not appear quite as happy as the giver of so genteel a party ought to have been. But poor Mrs. Dobbs had entered on a course, the probable end of which he knew full well; and when he thought of the possible ruin that might overtake his family, it was little wonder that he groaned.

"Jem, darling," said bright little Dolly next morning to her favourite brother, "why did you never come near us last night? It was such a pleasant party. Don't you care the least little bit in the world for dancing?"

"No, Dolly, I can't dance, you know I can't; no one would dance with me."

"O Jem! you know *I* would."

"I do, dear, but why should I spoil your fun?"

"You wouldn't, not a bit; I like you better than any one else in the world."

"I don't know why, then; when I see Fitz and Harcourt looking so nice and pleasant—talking to every one so easily, and doing everything so well—I feel—O Dolly, dear, I do feel so stupid. Why on

earth can't I do things as they do? and why on earth do you love me best?"

"I will tell you, Jem; because you are real. There you are, and just what I see you you really are. Now the rest are just like that pretty necklace Mamma wore last night, all glitter and show, and no reality. Fitz is handsome and quick, and he can talk about anything; but I have heard him boast how he talked of this and that, and never betrayed that he knew nothing about it. Why, listen to him about the business; he talks sometimes as if he was Papa's right hand, and I heard him tell Belinda the other day that, except a letter to copy once in a way, he never has anything to do; and they are all just the same. Listen to the girls bringing in a French word sometimes—they know as much French as I know of Sanscrit, my dear, and they 're just as often wrong as right; indeed, oftener. They are all shams, even to their very names! and I *hate* shams, and I won't be a sham, and I love my old Jem, because he isn't a sham! And now come along, Jem, and we'll have a nice country walk, and then you 'll feel better. You like a walk when I go too, don't you, Jem?"

"You know I do, Dolly; only for you, I'd run away."

"Don't run away without me, though; some day you and I will go off together, and make our fortunes, and leave them all to be genteel at their ease. You and I are the only drawback to the family gentility, Jem."

CHAPTER II.

MRS. MARTIN'S ARRIVAL.

I DO not think that I have yet mentioned that the gay party of which I have spoken was one of Mrs. Dobbs' Thursday evenings, or "at homes." Any one can give a party, but to have a weekly "at home," is not possible to many, and in fact it so happened that there was no one in Middlemore who gave "at homes" weekly, except Mrs. Dobbs. She thought it so much more genteel than giving parties. So it came about that a week having passed away, Thursday evening came round again, and dancing and music were again going on in the large rooms of Ballydobbs House, when a cab rattled up to the door, carrying on the top a small trunk, well corded, and much covered with labels of every size and hue.

When the two pretentious-looking footmen in canary-coloured livery with green adornments threw open the door, a small personage stood before them, wrapped in a long not very flowing cloak of a dark green tartan, with a small round cape of the same material, a poke bonnet, and a thick black veil. She had a good-sized basket in one hand, and a carpet bag in the other.

"Some mistake," said one footman grandly; and the other, not to be outdone, remarked, "We don't want any eggs to-day!" and shut the door. It is a remarkable fact that when people are purse-proud and insolent, their servants will be the same in their degree.

"Driver," said the muffled lady, "are you sure you have made no mistake? Is this certainly Mr. Dobbs' house?"

"Indeed it is, mum; Ballydobbs House, and that you could see for yourself if there was daylight, for it 's up on the gate-posts. I knows it well, for I often brings folk to these here parties."

"Oh, there 's a party, is there? Well, I must knock again."

Which she did, and that with vigour; and when the door again flew open she walked into the hall, saying—

"Tell your master that I am come. He expects me."

"I am very sorry, ma'am," said one of the men, rather puzzled, "but master is not in the house."

"Not in the house! Bless me! and a party going on. Well, tell your mistress then."

"Who shall I say, ma'am?"

"Mrs. Martin. No—say old Mrs. Dobbs."

The footman went, and seeking out his mistress, he gave his message in a low tone, still having his suspicions that all was not right. Mrs. Dobbs grew crimson. She had not expected the old lady to arrive so soon, nor to come without having written from Liverpool to announce herself. What *was* to be done? Fitz was dancing with Miss Darwin, but Harcourt was standing near, and she beckoned to him and to James, who was hiding himself as best he could in the

shadow of the window curtain. She sent one of them for Miranda and the other for Dolly; Belinda was dancing. Then she whispered to them all the evil tidings, and begged them to come with her to the hall and welcome the old lady.

"Welcome her!" exclaimed Miranda. "Well, Mamma, I really cannot do that; so very inconsiderate of her to come in this way. What on earth are we to do with her?"

"Bring her up here, get her a partner, and see how she 'll dance," cried Dolly. "Come along, all of you, I'm longing to see if I got myself up correctly the other day."

"Dorothea, you *must* be civil! More may depend upon it than you know. Miranda, I insist!" said Mrs. Dobbs impressively, as they hurried downstairs.

"My *dear* Mrs. Dobbs," cried the younger owner of that name, "is this really you? Tom will be so sorry not to be here, but he had to go to London on business."

The basket and bag were dropped, the black veil raised, and a nice little old face, with a lingering pink on the cheeks, and a pair of bright, kind, brown eyes, was turned wonderingly on the speaker.

"Why, it 's never Mary," cried a pleasant voice; "and yet it is, for sure. My dear, I 'd never ha' knowed ye. And don't tell me that this is Mary Anne," pointing at Dolly, "for I shan't be able to believe you."

"Good gracious! I feel that I shall faint," murmured Miranda. "Did you ever see such a guy, or hear such a way of speaking!"

And drawing back, she ran quickly upstairs, and

disappeared into the dancing-room, leaving her mother to get through her troubles as best she might.

"No, dear Mrs. Dobbs, this is my youngest—Dorothea. My eldest girl—she is here—O no, I see—never mind, James, we can find her by and by."

"Was that Mary Anne as ran upstairs without so much as a fold of muslin over her shoulders?" cried the traveller, in dismay. "I think, Mary Dobbs, times are changed with ye; your daughter seemed ashamed to own me."

"My *dearest* Mrs. Dobbs, what an idea! No doubt the dear girl remembered some engagement, and in my hurry to see you I had not told her that it was you. Harcourt, my love, assist Mrs. Dobbs to remove her muffling; and do you, James, see her luggage carried up into the front bedroom."

Harcourt assisted the stranger politely enough; but when the green cloak and a comfortable brown shawl beneath it were removed, and a trim little figure in a short, dark dress, with a red kerchief neatly pinned over the shoulders, and a white apron with large pockets full of biscuits was revealed, the remembrance of Dolly's get-up, thus proved to have been very correct, quite overcame Mr. Harcourt Dobbs' sense of good manners, and in his turn he ran off and disappeared; but in this case it was to conceal a laugh.

"Dolly, what *am* I to do?" whispered Mrs. Dobbs to her daughter. "Some one is sure to come down; the dance is nearly over, and they'll be going to the refreshment tables. What a shame of Miranda and Harcourt."

"Indeed it is a shame," said Dolly, whose bright

eyes had an angry light in them; "but there is no use in trying to make them behave themselves. Leave her to me, Mamma. *I'm* not ashamed of her, and neither is Jem. Go back to your grand company; I'll take care of Papa's friend."

"Dear Mrs. Dobbs," began the mistress of the house, affectedly.

"I think, Mary, you'd best call me Mrs. Martin, since Granny is out of date; it used to be Granny in old times. I've been called Martin ever since I went with Stephen, and I've got used to it. Folks out there didn't know as I'd been married again, and it will save ill-convenience here."

"It shall be as you wish; but I want to ask you to excuse me for a few moments; we have some young friends of my daughters' here to-night, and——"

"And you can't leave them with no one by, to see that all goes as it should?" said Mrs. Martin, as I shall call her for the future. "Quite right, Mary; young folks are the better for a mother's eye over them when they get merry-making together."

"And Dorothea will take care of you until I can get rid of this crowd, and come back to you."

"Come with me, Grandmamma—may I call you Grandmamma?" said Dolly. "James and I can be spared, you know; we are too young to be of any consequence. Papa will be quite vexed that he was not here to welcome you; he was telling us only the other day all he owes to you. Jem, carry that lamp into the little breakfast-room; no one will interrupt us there. And now, Jem, like a good boy as you are, run to the dining-room and forage; bring plenty of good things, for I am sure she is tired and hungry."

The little room, lighted up by Dolly's bright face and pleasant ways, looked cheery and comfortable, and food was welcome to the tired traveller.

"You must take a glass of wine, Grandmamma, and I have ordered some tea; but you look tired, and the wine will do you good."

"Thank you, my dear; you are very kind," said Mrs. Martin; and Dolly felt that there was a little hurt feeling in the voice, at which she was not surprised. Though the girl had a sharp tongue, she had a kind heart; and she did her very best to make her charge comfortable, and to cause her to forget the rude and discourteous behaviour of the rest. Mrs. Dobbs did not return; and when the old lady had had some supper, during which time Dolly chattered away, and even Jem tried to talk, they took her up to her room, and Dolly helped her to unpack and to undress, and left her snug in bed.

Then this indignant little maid went off to her own room, for, as she said to Jem, who was awaiting her to say good-night, "If I see them again, I *must* give them a piece of my mind—I couldn't help it, and there is no comfort in having a row before strangers, I shall have plenty of time to-morrow. Good-night, Jem; I rather think you and I will like Mrs. Martin; she seems a nice little body, with no airs about her."

Next morning Mrs. Martin was so tired after her long journey that she did not awake until the middle of the day. This gave Mrs. Dobbs time to thoroughly lecture her young people, and she succeeded in convincing them that their father would be seriously annoyed if they in any way slighted his stepmother.

"I daresay we shall be able to keep her out of sight a good deal," she added. "Poor old thing, she would be very much out of place in *our* circle; and most likely she will not stay long."

In the meantime, Mrs. Martin had at last awakened from a sound and refreshing sleep, and as the idea of breakfasting in bed was one which had never suggested itself to her, she got up and dressed herself in her neat black stuff gown with the red kerchief over her shoulders, a white muslin one appearing round her throat. The apron she folded up and laid by.

"Very like aprons are gone out of date," said she. "I saw that young fellow grin at it. I wonder who he is; he 's like Tom, but she called him by a name I don't know. That little Dolly is a nice creature; but to think of Tom's daughter dressed in white worked muslin and a gold thing round her throat. But it was a nice, modest dress, not like Mary Anne's, as hardly covered her decent. And so uncivil she was; and Mary was not that pleased to see me either. I 'm afraid their rise in life hasn't—— Well, there now, Bess, you needn't be seeing nothing but bad in them. Times are changed, and manners too, maybe, since you were young. You 're a homely old body, Bess, and these young folks are reared different. Not that little Dolly has a bit of it, nor that nice, quiet lad James either. Well! I 'll just say my prayers and go down. I 'm hungry; but I suppose dinner won't be later than two."

Mrs. Martin went downstairs, and after some little searching about, she opened the door of the dining-room, and, to her great amazement, found the greater part of the family at breakfast.

"Why, here is dear Mrs. Martin," cried Mrs. Dobbs, coming forward to meet her; and, mindful of the lecture they had just received, Fitz and Harcourt hastened to get a chair for the old lady. Neither of the girls moved, however; and Miranda seemed to think she had done her part when she inquired, languidly, whether she would have tea or coffee? Mrs. Martin was hungry, and was not too genteel to own it, so she was soon busy with her breakfast; while the others resumed the conversation which her appearance had interrupted. After listening with a puzzled look for some time, Mrs. Martin presently said—

"Mary, my dear, what names do you call your children? Surely this is Mary Anne? I remember her now; she's very little changed since she was a child; and I'd know Tommy's curly head among a thousand; and this, I think, is my name-child, Bess."

"My *dear* Mrs. Martin," cried Mrs. Dobbs, putting up her hands and hanging her head on one side as if to ward off a box on the ear, "spare me, pray; 'tis *years* since we have used those primitive names. In the circles in which we now move we found it quite necessary to get rid—to—to—discontinue them; and I really don't think the children would have the least idea that you were speaking to—that you were addressing them, if you used those foolish, forgotten names. My eldest girl is called Miranda; the second, Belinda; my eldest son, Fitzgerald; the other, Harcourt. And you will oblige me greatly if you will do—comply with our custom in this matter."

"Oh, certainly, my dear! if I can mind them. Berinda, Melinda, Fitzgerald, and—what's Harry?"

"Harcourt. *Miranda*, dear Mrs. Martin. Mary Anne—Miranda, a very slight change, you see. Belinda, for Bess; that, too, is a small alteration."

"I will remember, my dear, if I possibly can. Where is my bonny little lass of last night? And I don't see James either."

"They are out in the garden, I think. Dorothea is an early riser, and she is so fond of her garden."

"Two very good things. And when do you expect Tom? I hope you call him by his old name, for somehow I don't think I could call him by any other."

"No alteration has taken place in his name," said Mrs. Dobbs, impressively. She spoke as if names were naturally subject to changes, a fate which her husband's plain Tom had somehow escaped. "He will be home by dinner-time. Will you come now and see the house and grounds, dear Mrs. Martin? I am such a poor delicate creature that I seldom venture out so early, but I should like to show you everything."

So Mrs. Martin was taken all over the house, and all the new furniture was displayed to her. Then the gardens, conservatories, etc., were visited; all with the intention of impressing her with a just notion of the consequence, wealth, and gentility of the Dobbs family. Her only comment was that these things must cost a power of money.

Mr. Dobbs came home at about five o'clock, and disgusted his wife by seeming truly glad to see his stepmother, even though he was ill at ease in her presence.

The next two days passed away quietly. The

Miss Dobbs, Miranda and Belinda (for Dolly was not yet allowed to go to parties, except at home), went to a dance in the town, and of course their mother went with them, and so did Fitz and Harcourt. Old Mrs. Martin, who, if the truth must be told, found genteel life a dull thing, and longed sorely for her seven pretty grand-daughters, and her busy farm life in far Australia, had gone to bed at her usual hour, nine o'clock: and coming down to breakfast at nine the next morning, she found only Dolly and Jem in the dining-room.

"Well," said she, "Dolly, my dear, do you mean to wait a bit for the rest? for if so, I'll thank you for a bit of bread, just to stay my stomach, for I'm fine and hungry."

"They won't be down till twelve or one o'clock, Granny, dear. And I daresay Papa won't get up either, he seldom does on Sundays."

"My dear! and about going to church!" exclaimed the poor old lady, in the sudden shock of the moment. She had determined never to say a word to the young people to show that she disapproved of their parents; it was hard to avoid doing so, however, when she saw so much that seemed to her to be wrong, and on this occasion the words were out before she knew what she was saying.

"Church! Oh, because it's Sunday?" said Dolly. "Granny, dear, we do not trouble church much—except Harcourt. He goes because otherwise I believe they wouldn't ordain him, or something of that kind; but I scarcely think even Harcourt will make his appearance in time to-day. They were not home till three o'clock."

Mrs. Martin had turned quite pale, and looked as she felt, very much shocked.

"Why, Granny," exclaimed Dolly, "you look quite solemn and horrified."

"Do I, dear?"

"Indeed you do. I'm sorry I told you if you are vexed; but, after all, you would soon have found it out for yourself."

"Yes, my dear, I suppose so. No, thank you, Jem, no more toast; I'll have another cup of tea, Dolly."

James kept looking at the good old face, which had by no means regained its usual colour or expression. He had often watched that face before, and wondered, in his silent way, what gave it that look of contented, tender brightness—a subdued brightness that no neglect nor half-concealed rudeness had the power to ruffle for more than a moment. But now the brightness was gone, and James, observing it, at last blurted out—

"Why do you care so much about it, ma'am? I will go to church with you if you like."

"Will you, my dear lad? I shall be very glad to have you with me. And you, Dolly, won't you come too?"

Dolly hesitated for one moment. Mamma would be angry with her if she went to church with Mrs. Martin, that was certain; but then Mamma's anger was not a very dreadful thing, and she was so often angry for such silly, insufficient reasons that perhaps Dolly was not to blame that she did not care much about it. The other girls would have almost died rather than appear in public with that little prim,

respectable, old-world figure; but, curious to say, Dolly had not a thought of that kind, so ungenteel was sweet little Dolly. So she made up her mind to go.

"Yes, Granny," she said, "we 'll go together; you and I and Jem. I will order the carriage."

"O no, dear—not for me! It is a fine day, and why should we give the servants trouble of a Sunday? Let us walk, Dolly."

"Very well, Granny. I have no objection. Let us go to the drawing-room until it is time to get ready."

James followed them into the drawing-room, and taking up a book, held it as if he were reading, but really he was still watching Mrs. Martin's face. She lay back in an easy chair with her eyes closed, and the pained look gradually faded away.

"Granny," said James.

"Well, dear heart?" But James only got red and was silent.

"What was it, Jem? Didn't you speak to me?"

"He said 'Granny,' ma'am, and that was a good deal for Jem to say," remarked saucy Dolly.

"But he must have meant to say more."

"I don't know that! When he and I take a walk, he says, 'Dolly!' and cocks his head on one side, like this; and then I know that he hears a bird singing; and I listen, and say it is very pretty. Presently he says 'Dolly!' again, and cocks his eye, like this; then I know it is the view. And after a while, he says 'Dolly!' in a tone of agony; and then I know that he sees some one coming who may speak to us; but he seldom says more than that."

Jem laughed, and said "Dolly!" in a deprecating tone; and then wondered what the others laughed at so heartily.

"You're a saucy little lassie, Miss Dolly, and I ought not to encourage you this way. What did he mean when he said 'Granny,' just now; for I suppose you can tell me?"

"I was not listening: Jem, could you say it again, or tell us what you meant by it?"

"Just this," said Jem; "What makes you so different from everybody else, Granny; so much happier, more contented, and more thoughtful for others?"

"I'm no better than my neighbours, dear."

"Then your neighbours must all be very good," said Dolly. "You're a great deal better than *our* neighbours."

"Well, if I am, dear, it's not myself; it's just because—because God helps me to be."

"And is that what makes you happy, ma'am?" said James.

"Indeed it is, dear heart."

"How can I get Him to help me, for I'm not happy, Granny? I want something—I always have, though I never knew what it was."

"You want to know God," answered the old woman, quietly.

"And how can I get to know Him?" asked Jem.

"Come to church, for one thing; and there's the bells beginning. Dolly, dear, make haste and get ready; don't let us be late."

She jumped up and escaped to her own room, for she wanted time to think over what had passed, and

what she ought to say to this poor boy if he spoke to her again, as she had little doubt he would.

"So this is the work the Master brought me here to do," she murmured, as she tied on her little black poke bonnet. "That dear lad, and bright, merry Dolly! O my poor, dear Tom, to think you 've let things come to this; and not a soul, servant or anyone else, as I can see, thinking of going to church this blessed day. Only for Dolly and Jem, I should wish myself back in the plain, rough life, with my good, God-fearing Stephen and the children. But I *do* hope this is the work I was meant to do. For it is not to help Tom, I fear; he keeps away, and I feel sure he 'll not let me say two words to him; and as to Mary, poor soul! But Jem and Dolly are different."

And having now pinned her shawl to her mind, Mrs. Martin went down into the hall, where she found the two young people waiting for her.

CHAPTER III.

A STRAIGHT LINE.

JAMES DOBBS had, of course, been at church before often enough; indeed, Mrs. Dobbs generally went in great state, when the day was fine, and neither too hot nor too cold, nor too windy, nor too dusty, nor too anything else, for a "delicate creature," as she loved to call herself, to be out. Mrs. Dobbs was fully possessed by the common but unaccountable notion that it is a sign of superior gentility to be weakly and sickly, and that good health (that greatest of earthly blessings) is a thing to be apologised for. There are fifty-two Sundays in the year, and I really think Mrs. Dobbs went to church on at least twenty of them; and until her children grew up she had always taken them with her. Of late, Dolly had been the only daughter whose attendance she could command, for Miranda and Belinda, naturally going a little beyond their parents, preferred to stay at home and read novels. And where Dolly went, James followed; so he had been at church sometimes, even since he had ceased to be a child. He went simply because Dolly went; and I do not think he had ever asked himself why any one went there—what it all

meant; and I am pretty sure that he had never attended during the service, and *quite* sure that he slept during the sermon. To-day, however, he went with different feelings. Those last words of his conversation with Mrs. Martin had set him thinking. "How can I get to know Him?" he had said: and she had answered, "Come to church, for one thing."

If good Mrs. Martin had been studying Jem all his life, she could not have done better than just say that, and leave him to puzzle over it. For if his intellect was slow, it was also patient. He could not learn quickly, and there was nothing brilliant about him; but when once an idea got into his head, he turned it over and over, and pondered it, until he had made it a part of himself. And as he walked along, behind Mrs. Martin and Dolly, he considered that short sentence, and came to the conclusion that it was nonsense to go to church to stare about or to doze, for that it must be intended that something should be learned there. So he made up his mind to attend carefully, and perhaps, dull as he was, he might pick up something.

Very soon they were in the church, and being early, they easily found seats. And presently the service began.

"I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son."

Often had he listened carelessly to those words, to-day he listened with his heart.

Neither of service nor sermon did he lose one word —there was no comfortable doze for Jem that day.

When Dolly and Mrs. Martin had joined, the one her fresh young voice, the other a little murmuring "croon" to the closing hymn, they were ready to leave the church; and then they became aware that James had deserted them. Nor was he waiting at the door; nor did either of them see him again until they all met at dinner. He had slipped away, feeling that he must be alone, to think over, and make his own of what he had heard.

No one at Ballydobbs could attend Evensong, because dinner was ready at seven o'clock; and the evening was very long and tiresome, as Sunday evenings were wont to be in that family. Mrs. Martin, indeed, escaped it, because she went to bed, and Dolly escaped not long afterwards and went to her own room, to read—what, we will not inquire. James had disappeared again after dinner; but she knew that he would come to say good-night, and therefore she did not go to bed, which was her usual way of shortening the dull Sunday evening. At last he knocked at the door, and came in.

"Why, Jem, you are a bold man to venture near me; do you know that, sir?"

"No, Dolly; why?"

"Oh, how innocent we are; because you ran away, sir, before church was over, and left me and Granny to get home as best we could! And then you never came to take me out for a walk as usual, and so I've had to listen to Mirrie and Linda talking nonsense about their partners all day, until at last I told them they were a couple of geese, and ran away myself!"

"Dolly, was I rude? I hope Mrs. Martin did not think so?"

"No, no! Don't look so vexed; I was only in fun. She did not mind a bit, dear kind old soul. I do love her, Jem; she is so real."

"She is. Dolly; look here, Dolly!"

"I'm looking. At least, I'm listening, which is what you mean, I suppose."

"I want you to join me in asking Mrs. Martin to teach us, Dolly. I know she is not an educated woman," he added, in answer to her look of surprise, "but she can teach us something that we know nothing about. Will you, Dolly?"

"I'll do anything you like, dear," said Dolly, heartily.

"You and I have always held together," James said. "Good-night, Dolly, dear!"

He kissed her, and was gone, leaving her more puzzled than she had ever been before since she could remember.

Next day there was a flower-show held in the town-hall of Middlemore; and thither, decked in bonnets which were flower-shows in themselves, did Mrs. Dobbs and her young people betake themselves. Mr. Dobbs had left the house, as usual, soon after breakfast, and had laid his commands upon his wife to ask Mrs. Martin to go with her to the flower-show; but Mrs. Dobbs contrived to do this in such fashion that a much duller person than Mrs. Martin would have declined. So Dolly refused to go either; and when the party was fairly gone, she and Mrs. Martin established themselves in the smaller of the two drawing-rooms, and produced their work. Mrs. Martin was knitting a woollen jersey for one of her grandsons, and Dolly was dressing a doll for a bazaar at

which her elder sisters had promised to furnish a table; a promise which had at least provided Dolly with plenty of the kind of work she liked and did cleverly.

"I wonder where James is, Dolly? I have not seen the lad to-day. He's busy, I suppose."

"I have hardly seen him either, Granny; but I am sure he is in the house, for he would have told me if he was going out."

"How old is Jem, dear?"

"He will be eighteen next month."

"And, dear me, Dolly, does he never study anything? He's too young to have given up learning, when he's not called on to work for his bread."

Dolly reddened, and a very angry light came into her usually merry eyes.

"Don't talk about that, Granny," said she, "for it is one of the things I always get into a passion about."

Having said this, she at once proceeded to talk about it herself.

"It is a shame; it is one of the things that makes me inclined to hate them all! Fitz and Harcourt were kept at school until they were nineteen, and Harcourt is going to college. *They* are clever, you know. But they think Jem dull; and would you believe it, Granny, they took him away from school at the same time as Harcourt, and have never given him masters at home, or anything."

"Maybe he was not getting on, though. Was that it, Dolly?"

"No, indeed! The masters were satisfied with him. He did not get on quickly—he is not quick in

anything—but he worked hard and was doing well. I call it a shame—I do indeed! What is he to do? He cannot idle about here all his life, you know. I have spoken to Mamma ever so often, and at last she got quite angry, and bid me hold my tongue, for he was a dull creature and would never do them credit, so she was not going to waste money on him! Why, the money they spend in giving those parties would pay for his schooling."

Mrs. Martin, though one of the most simple-minded of women, was no fool, and had had a good deal of experience; and the thought which came into her mind as she listened to the girl's disclosures, was that schooling is one of those things which must be paid for at once. "Stephen was right," thought she.

"And when did you leave school, my dear?"

"Too soon! I left last year. But I don't care so much about that; though Miss Wilson was furious, because she said I should have done her credit in a year or two. You know it does not matter so much about me, for I am a girl, and shall always be at home, naturally; and Mamma wanted me, for Mirrie and Linda are of no use when she is poorly. But Jem must some day do something for himself, and I call it cruel to—hush! here he comes. I hear his step."

James came in, with a rather unusual look upon his face. Instead of glancing nervously round, ready to shrink back if met by a sarcastic remark upon his appearance or manner, he looked pre-occupied and walked in quite boldy.

"Well, Jem, what have you been about all day?" asked Dolly, gaily. "You did not know how snug

Granny and I were here, all by ourselves, or you would have made your appearance long ago."

"Yes, but I was busy."

"Busy about what, Jem?"

"Reading; and I found—Mrs. Martin, I wanted to read the whole story from which those words are taken: 'I will arise,' you know; and I found a Bible and read it. And I want you, if you will take the trouble, ma'am, to explain some things in it. Dolly, did you ask her, as I said last night?"

"No, because I did not understand what you want, Jem."

"Mrs. Martin, Dolly and I—*would* you teach us to understand the things you spoke of yesterday? I am afraid you must think me very forward to ask this; and you'll find me very dull; but I don't know how it is, I feel I *must* ask questions and learn about this. It is what I have been wanting all my life; and I do want it so badly."

Dolly stared, and even pinched herself to make sure that she was awake, and that this was indeed Jem—dull, silent, shy Jem, who, even to her, seldom talked much, and never about himself or his feelings. What had come to him? She did not understand him in the least, and it only added to her puzzle to see that Mrs. Martin evidently did. She listened eagerly to what passed.

"You want it badly, James. I am right glad to hear it, dear lad; for as sure as you want, you'll get. Tell me, though, why do you want it?"

"Want what?" said Dolly; but they did not hear her.

"I want it, because life seems to me so empty.

There seemed to be nothing for me to do, no place for me, no one who cared for me but Dolly—she always did—and only for that I must have run away long ago. I feel all astray, you know; nothing to hold on by, nothing to look forward to; and nobody to care, or help me. But since yesterday——"

"Ay, Jem, since yesterday. I'm listening, dear lad, don't stop. I saw there was something working in your mind; what is it?"

"'I will arise and go to my Father,'" said James, quietly. "It seems to me, ma'am, that if I can find that Father, I shall have—all I want."

"And so you will, dear lad; you may take my word for that."

"Yes, but how am I to go? The next thing I heard (in church, you know) was—stay, I can't remember it rightly."

There was a beautiful Church-service, bound in crimson velvet, on the table, and Jem took it up and read the Confession.

"That ought to be the next step, I suppose, Granny?"

"James, you came asking me to teach you, but it 's my belief that you 've a better teacher than old Bess Dobbs, or any one else on earth. Yes, my dear lad, the next step is to feel that we are sinners, and to confess it."

"But Jem isn't a sinner!" cried Dolly, half laughing, half angry. "He is a great deal better than most people."

"O Dolly, you know nothing about it," said James, quickly. How strangely the two had changed places! for generally she was the leader, the explainer, the

one quick to see and understand everything. Ah, but in *this* learning, child-like simplicity and a very humble heart are needed, and these Jem had.

"Why, Jem," the girl said uneasily, "you 've not been doing bad things unknown to me?"

"Nothing that you don't know of, dear; only you can't see into me. I know how true it is that I have done things I ought not to have done, and left undone things that I ought to have done."

"Now, Jem, *do* behave sensibly; Granny will just think that you are a young scamp. If you have done nothing that I don't know of, I can answer for you that you have nothing on your conscience."

"I feel the sin in my heart," said James, simply.

"Oh, well!" said Dolly, taking up her work again, and speaking with a raised colour and in rather a sharp voice, "I shall never make much progress in this kind of learning if one must begin by saying that one is a dreadful sinner, for I really can't say it. In fact, I know I am not."

"The question is what *is* sin?" put in Mrs. Martin.

"Why, telling lies, stealing, coveting, swearing—breaking the commandments, in short," answered Dolly.

"Breaking God's law in any way," said Mrs. Martin.

"I don't understand a word you are saying," remarked Dolly.

"Because I am bad at teaching, my dear. Stephen generally teaches his young folk himself, so I am sure you find it hard to understand me; but I 'll try to explain my meaning. Suppose you had to rule a straight

line, and it *must* be perfectly straight; and your hand slipped, and you made ever such a little bend, or hitch, in one part of it, would it be a perfect straight line?"

"No—but if it was straight on the whole, it would do."

"Ah, Dolly! that's the question. If it is not straight, it's not straight, and that's all about it."

"Well, but," said Dolly, defiantly, "where's the hitch in my line? What part of the commandments do I not keep?"

"Oh, my dear child! The question is, what part *do* you keep—or any of us; I'm not saying you're worse than others. Every angry word, every angry thought even, unless we have just cause for it and keep it within bounds; every idle, unkind speech—ah! Dolly, don't ask me, but pray that you may get to know yourself, and then you won't doubt whether you are a sinner or not."

Dolly was silent and went on with her work. Mrs. Martin and James had a great deal of conversation, but she did not attend to it. She had a curious feeling as if she longed to follow James, and yet was half angry to find their positions reversed, and James trying to lead her. Moreover, she had a very good opinion of herself, and these new ideas were not pleasant. So she pouted her pretty red lips, and pricked her fingers sadly as she dressed her gay doll; and felt quite relieved when the party returned from the flower-show, and James, hearing the knock, left the room. Mrs. Martin also went to put away her knitting, for Mrs. Dobbs so plainly disliked to see her at work at so common an article as a jersey, that she

never worked at it, except when alone with Dolly, keeping a soft, fleecy shawl for "company work."

"Why, who has been meddling with my beautiful Church-service?" exclaimed Mrs Dobbs, as soon as she was in the room. "Look at it, lying on the floor, fallen off the table evidently; very careless of Anne, and I shall give her a right good scolding."

"Oh, it was not Anne, Mamma," said Dolly.

"Then it was Mrs. Martin, I suppose?"

Dolly was silent.

"Well, I declare, if she *must* read the Bible at such odd times, she might use one of her own. It is a very great liberty, and ——"

Here Mrs. Martin opened the door and came in, and Mrs. Dobbs turned to her.

"*Dear* Mrs. Martin, it was quite a pity you could not make up your mind to come with us. Such roses! I declare it made me feel quite ashamed of ours, and so I shall tell M'Clure. We pay him so highly, we really ought to have as good roses as any one else."

Dolly felt virtuously indignant, for a moment, at her mother's deceitful sweetness. For a moment only, for then it struck her that she had been quite as deceitful when she allowed Mrs. Martin to bear the blame of Jem's awkwardness. But then, Mrs. Martin would not be scolded, and poor dear Jem did get so snubbed. Yes; but how about that straight line?

Then Miranda and Belinda, while refreshing themselves with cups of tea, began talking, as foolish girls do talk sometimes, about the gentlemen they had met at the flower-show. I need not repeat all they said, for it was very silly stuff, without even a bit of fun to

brighten it up. But at last Miranda observed complacently—

"Yes, I really think, Linda, that Major Douglas is getting quite particular in his attentions to me. He said to-day that my name ought to be Rose, and that I was——"

Now Dolly had a curious distaste to this kind of talk; she was far more acute than either of her sisters, and knew very well what the young men who crowded their rooms on Thursday nights really thought of them; moreover, she was a little out of temper just now, so instead of allowing poor silly Miranda to finish her sentence in peace, she interrupted her with—

"Major Douglas! and do you really think, Mirrie, that he admires you? Why, he's as proud as Lucifer! He thinks himself (and indeed he is too) very much above us. And I can tell you, my dear, that all the time he is making silly speeches to you, he is only laughing at you in his sleeve. I *know* it, for I have heard the others saying, to look at him, and laughing about it."

"Laughing at me!" exclaimed Miranda, indignantly.

"Yes, indeed, at you; and no wonder, for you do make a great fool of yourself about him."

Miranda burst into tears, Linda scolded, Mrs. Dobbs talked a little, and cried a little, in her usual weak way. Mrs. Martin got up, looked gravely at Dolly, and left the room. And naughty Dolly, who had been enjoying the storm she had raised, suddenly remembered a verse of the Bible which she had learned at school (poor child, she had learned nothing good at home): "Be pitiful, be courteous." Well,

but she had only spoken the truth. Yes, but this "Be pitiful, be courteous," is a direct command; how, then, about that straight line?

She jumped up impatiently, and ran out into her garden, to try if change of place would bring pleasant thoughts; but go where she would, that straight line would not get out of her head, and even James found her a little cross that evening.

When he came to her room to say good-night, he said to her wistfully, "Dolly, I've vexed you somehow, but won't you forgive me?"

Dolly began to cry, to his great amazement.

"It is not your fault, Jem, it is myself. I've been as cross as two sticks all the evening. Give me a kiss, my good, patient, kind old Jem, and I'll be good to-morrow."

"Dolly, isn't it a blessing Mrs. Martin came here?"

"Well, now, Jem, I can't say I think so; we did very well without her."

"O Dolly! never mind, dear, you'll change your mind, I am sure you will."

"Good-night, Jem. Bother Mrs. Martin and her old straight line!"

"Ah!" said Jem, "but isn't it nice for a dull fellow like me that it *is* a straight line, easy to find and easy to follow?"

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. MARTIN'S DEPARTURE.

DOLLY awoke next morning rather earlier than she cared to get up, and as she lay enjoying a delicious hour of half-waking sleep, that tiresome notion of the straight line came into her head. She actually gave a little kick to her bedclothes, and said aloud, "I will *not* be bothered about that old straight line any more." Still she could by no means forget it, and at last, being now wide awake, she gave herself up to meditation, of which meditation the result was this. Jem was a darling, there was no one like him in the world; and if his happiness depended upon keeping to this weary straight line, and getting her to do the same, why, do it she must. And, after all, it would be pleasant and easy. One had only to read the Bible, and do everything it told you to do, and there was your line straight enough. And one would feel so comfortable! No doubts as to whether a thing was right or not. No wonder Jem said it was easy; and in fact it must be easy, or he would not understand about it so quickly. Ah, Miss Dolly! but it is only plain to those who look for it humbly.

Intent upon these thoughts, she got up presently,

and when dressed, went to a light closet inside her room, where she kept her school-books and various other possessions. After some search she possessed herself of her school Bible, which she found in a corner, very dusty.

"A shame for Anne to have such a dusty corner," said Dolly, as she hastily dusted her book. Then she sat down in the window of her bedroom, to read.

"But I've never said my prayers," muttered Dolly; "that would make a serious hitch in the line I suppose."

So she knelt down near the window, as her custom was, for she sometimes took a peep at the garden while thus engaged. However, on this occasion she did not peep; she said her prayers slowly and attentively, and rose with the feeling that in this respect at least she had ruled her line uncommonly straight.

"Now, what shall I read? I suppose I had better begin at the beginning. One ought to know the whole Bible, for fear something might be left undone."

So she read the first two or three chapters of Genesis, and then put a mark in the place. Turning the leaves over idly, as she sat there waiting for the breakfast bell to ring, she presently lighted upon the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee who went up into the temple to pray. She read it through; and into her head came the strange idea, "When I have been keeping to this straight line for a good long time, I shall be something like this Pharisee, I think. I wonder why he was in the wrong; he seems to have been a good man, unless, of course, he was telling lies. What is a Pharisee, by the way?

St. Paul was one. I remember dear, good Miss Wilson's lessons about him a little. Well, there 's the bell at last; I declare all this thinking has made me very hungry."

She laid the Bible on the window seat and ran off.

Poor Dolly! She began that day with such a resolution to keep to the straight line, and such a conviction that it was easy to do it. And need I say that before evening she had utterly failed? She knew it; she had been saucy to her mother, rude to her sisters, and disobliging to Harcourt, who wanted a button sewed on his glove in a hurry. Had it been quite true, either, to say that she was busy when he made the request, when she was only reading a novel? These were, most of them, little things; but Dolly had sense enough to know, and candour enough to acknowledge, that it was in little things only that she had a chance of leaving, or keeping to, the straight line.

It happened that Mrs. Martin had gone out that day, attended by James, who offered to be her escort, in order to look up a few of her old Manchester friends. These were all in a humble way of life, and for this reason this expedition was very displeasing to Mrs. Dobbs, and it was, indeed, about this very matter that Dolly was saucy to her mother. Neither Mrs. Martin nor Jem being at hand, Dolly had no one to consult in her unexpected difficulty; and on reflection she was glad of this, as she determined to give herself another day or two before she confessed herself defeated. It would take me too long if I were to enter at length into an account of the steps by which she was brought to see that she did not and could not

keep to the straight line without help; but before long she did see it, and was as anxious as James himself to get Mrs. Martin to explain matters and to advise her. How many a pleasant, quiet hour did these three spend together, generally in the little breakfast-room. James always had questions to ask, which Mrs. Martin would answer to the best of her ability; and as she knew her Bible very well, she was by no means a bad teacher. But as it had been at the beginning, so it continued to be to the last of these talks. James, the dull boy of the family, took in this new learning easily, readily, as if it had been his necessary food; Dolly, bright, clever Dolly, found it far more perplexing and less delightful. Still she did learn, and it was not long before she was ready to say with Jem, "What a blessing it is that Mrs. Martin came here!"

But the time was drawing near when Mrs. Martin must leave her pupils and return to Australia. She had already stayed longer than was convenient or pleasant to herself, partly on their account, partly in the hope that her stepson would speak openly to her at last, and make it possible for her to let him have the money she had brought with her. Stephen Martin's directions had been;—that if she found that Tom was really, as he said, and as men in business often are, only hampered for want of a sum of ready money, while his business was sound and good, and there was a reasonable hope that this money would set him all right again, then, even if there were a serious risk, Tom was to have the money. For Stephen Martin had always been very fond of Tom, and being a prosperous man, was ready to risk a little to help him.

But Stephen Martin had always disliked and distrusted Mrs. Dobbs, and he knew that his half-brother (quarter-brother, rather, if there is such a relation) was a very weak man in some ways, and was not a person of steady principle. So he charged his mother that if she found the family living in an extravagant way, spending every penny they could lay hands on; and if the business would not bear inspection, she was to bring him back his money. Mrs. Martin had made several attempts to get Mr. Dobbs to talk to her frankly, and had told him plainly that she was bound to satisfy herself about his business before she advanced the money. This she proposed to do by employing a very honest, capable man, a friend and correspondent of Stephen's, to go over Mr. Dobbs' books with him, and then to make her understand enough for her purpose. But to this Mr. Dobbs would by no means consent; he, on his part, offered to show his books to Mrs. Martin herself, and to explain everything to her satisfaction. However, she justified her son's choice of a messenger, by simply refusing, on the ground that she was not capable of forming an opinion. Then Mr. Dobbs declared that his feelings were hurt at Stephen's mistrust, and that he had made other arrangements, and no longer wanted the money; and Mrs. Martin tried to believe him, but she carried out her instructions, and Mr. Dobbs did not get the money.

"O Granny, Granny, what shall we do without you?" exclaimed Dolly, when Mrs. Martin told her two favourites that she must set out on her homeward journey in a few days.

"Why, my dear, you 've learned all, I think, that I

could teach you; and you've learned to look to a better Friend than old Bess Dobbs. And I've done all I can in the matter that brought me here, little enough that is, too, except to get a sore heart. And the children and Stephen want me home again."

"I don't wonder at that, Granny; nor do I wonder that you would like to be out of this," Dolly answered, with a sigh; for of late Mrs. Dobbs had scarcely been civil to her guest.

"For many reasons, it's best for me to go, dear. When I first came, I remember saying to myself that even if I did no good in *one* way, yet perhaps, after all, the Master had work for me to do in this house; and you see, so He had. We three may never meet again in this life, for you know I'm getting an old woman now, and I feel as if this long journey had taken a good deal out of me; but I have a good hope we shall meet in the happy country where there will be no more sea. No oceans to part us there, you know. Dear me, children, I shall be main glad when I see you coming; I shall watch for you, as fondly as for my own dear children over the sea yonder. James, my dear lad, I've been thinking about your prospects a good deal lately. It seems a pity for you to be doing nothing."

"I can't go on like that any more, Granny. I have a plan that seems a good one, if you will help me?"

"To be sure I will, dear, if I can."

"I want you to speak to my father for me. When I was at school, I was slow at everything except arithmetic. I was said to be very good at that. And if my father would go to the expense of some lessons for me in book-keeping, I would work hard until I

was fit for a place as accountant; a good accountant need never want work I 've heard. I write a bad hand, but I 'll work at that too, and improve myself."

"I 'll speak about it to-morrow, Jem, when I tell him I am going away, and I have little doubt he will do what I ask. When you are ready to take a situation, my dear lad, get one, and make yourself independent. Now, don't think little of that advice, Jem; but bear it in mind, and act upon it."

"I will, Granny," said James, looking up quickly at her. "Don't be afraid, I know it is good advice."

"And now, Dolly, my little woman, I'm going to make myself busy in your affairs."

"Do, Granny, or I shall be jealous of Jem. He 's not to get all the advice."

"But I don't think you will altogether like my advice, little one, for you won't see the reason of it. Now that you have learned to think rightly on serious subjects, Dolly, I am sure you feel that you couldn't live for nothing but balls and parties."

"I never felt as if I could do that, Granny; but now less than ever."

"Then you 'll be surprised, Dolly, at what I 'm going to say. You won't be doing right, my dear, if you refuse to follow the rest altogether, and separate yourself from them. No, indeed, dear, you need not look so amazed. You would have to disobey your mother, you know; and you must neither do that nor set up your own opinion and judgment, and tell them that you are right and they are wrong."

"Who, ma'am?" said Dolly, mischievously.

"You know what I mean now, so don't make me speak too plain. You must be wise, and think and

pray over things. And when you are asked to go here and there, go pleasantly sometimes, and be always pleasant at home. You may end in getting some influence over them, and putting better things into their heads, poor things; but mind me, Dolly, you'll never do that by keeping to yourself and saying sharp things."

At which Dolly laughed and blushed.

"I don't say sharp things so often now, Granny. I will remember what you say. Oh, how I wish you would be here to advise me!"

"You've a better Counsellor, child. And, Dolly, I wish you'd be learning to do something useful. Dear heart, but it hurts me to see you using your clever hands in nothing but making useless fal-lals for bazaars; and the time may come when your comfort, ay, and the comfort of more than yourself, may just depend upon your knowing how to do things."

"Comfort! O Granny! there are always plenty of people to do useful, tiresome things. Don't you think it would be a waste of time?"

"Indeed I don't! I'd have every woman know how to make a bed, clean a room, and cook a dinner that one could eat. Ay, and able to cut out and make her own clothes too."

"Well now, Granny, why should I learn to do all that? I don't want to live idle, you know, but the servants do all that—and the dressmakers, of course. And if I set to work and learned to do it all, in the end I should never equal their work, and when I had learned it, it would never be of any use to me."

"You don't know that! Suppose you marry a poor man? Then you won't be able to pay high wages to

your servants, so you 'll have to put up with girls that have their work to learn. And who 's to teach them, if their mistress does not know the least thing about it? And if Jem gets a situation, and wants you for a housekeeper, would it not be well to know something about housekeeping?"

"I suppose so. I never looked at it in that way."

"But look at it now, dear, and promise me that when I am gone you will coax cook and Anne to teach you what you want to know; and learn a little dressmaking, it 's always useful."

Granny spoke with more earnestness than Dolly could quite understand; but the girl could not refuse what her old friend was so plainly anxious about, particularly when Jem added—

"I wish you would, Dolly. I should like my housekeeper to be a knowledgeable body."

Dolly laughed and promised, little guessing at the secret reasons which made them urge her. For Jem had his suspicions, though he kept them to himself.

Mrs. Martin kept her promise and spoke to her stepson about James. Now, for some unknown reason, Mr. Dobbs had of late taken quite a dislike, apparently, to James. He said, when Mrs. Martin tried to soften him towards the lad, that his feelings arose from Jem's dull ways, so unlike all his other children; but the plain truth, if he dared have faced it, was that he saw that James dimly distrusted him of late, and felt that he, being young and single-minded, would be a severe judge if his own dishonesty should ever be disclosed. However, he promised that the boy should have a good tutor, and that he would get him into some office when he was ready for it. Then Mrs.

Martin asked leave for Jem to go with her to Liverpool to see her off, and though Miranda and Belinda tittered and giggled at her choice of an escort, James went, and took very good care of the dear old woman, whose visit to England he had such good reason to remember thankfully. Then he came home, and set to work in good earnest to prepare for making himself independent, which, for reasons he never hinted at even to Dolly, was the most earnest wish of his heart.

Business matters are not very interesting, but still the course of my story obliges me to take some notice of Mr. Dobbs' doings in that line, and all I can do is to make it as short as I can. It happened, just after Mrs. Martin left England, that the town-hall of Middlemore (where the flower-show had been held) was burnt to the ground; and as Middlemore was a rising town, the business men determined to build a new and a very superior town-hall. For this purpose a large sum of money was collected, and Mr. Dobbs was chosen to be the treasurer. Then a committee was appointed to select a design and make arrangements with an architect; and this committee quarrelled over the rival merits of two rival architects, and got into such a hopeless state of anger and confusion, that there seemed but little hope that the question would ever be decided. Nothing more was done, and the money lay idle in Mr. Dobbs' hands. Now, not having succeeded in getting that money from Mrs. Martin, affairs had reached such a crisis with Mr. Dobbs, that he must have a large sum at once or call a meeting of his creditors, and ask for time to retrieve his affairs. When he mentioned the

latter alternative to his wife, she wept and bewailed herself, and declared that he would ruin all his children; and, between crying and scolding, she got him to promise to put off the evil day as long as he could. To this end he, not confiding the mad, dishonest action even to his wife, used a great part of the money entrusted to him, hoping that some successful venture would enable him to replace it before the committee made up its quarrel.

Many a shabby, grasping, barely honest thing had he done before. For several years his prosperity had been declining, and money getting scarcer and scarcer; but never before had he put himself in the terrible position he now filled. He was indeed a miserable man, and his temper became so uncertain that he made his home miserable too. Mrs. Dobbs, seeing the sad change in her once kind and easy-going husband, began to dread the future more and more every day. And even then a word from her might have saved him. By prompt measures—realising every penny he possessed, and selling house and furniture—he might have replaced the trust money, and begun the world again with fair hopes of success. But Mrs. Dobbs never said that word; she clung to her fine house, and fine company, and fine dress, and to her hopes of rich marriages for her children; and what the end of it all was we shall soon see.

So passed away several months. During this time Fitz became engaged to Miss Darwin, although, as her guardians refused to give consent, they could not be married until she was of age, which she would be in six months. Fitz was quite content to

wait, but Mrs. Dobbs, who had never reckoned on such a delay in her plans, was dreadfully annoyed about it.

As to Miranda and Belinda, they were in a sad plight. The regiment quartered in Middlemore was changed, and away went all their admirers, even that dreadful Major Douglas! and neither of the girls was married, or even engaged. Mrs. Dobbs was really cross with them about it, which was surely hard on them, for it certainly was not their fault. They were as ready to be married as girls who are taught to consider a "good match" the highest possible blessing, and any match better than none, generally are. Everything they did, they did it in the hope of getting married, and it was really hard to imagine what they would do with themselves when this object should be either attained or plainly unattainable. What a miserable fate girls prepare for themselves who live as these poor silly things did! If for no higher and better reason, yet surely for their own peace and happiness, such a state of affairs ought to be as dreadful to every girl as it is disgusting in the eyes of every sensible being.

Dolly had not forgotten her promise to her dear granny, and in spite of her mother's lamentations over her low tastes and general want of gentility, she apprenticed herself to cook, housemaid, and dressmaker, and being quick and clever, she found these employments very amusing. She really had a genius for cooking, and soon took great pride in her cakes, etc. Truth to say, Jem's housekeeper was ready long before he had a house to keep, though the time when he must try what he could do for himself was nearer than he imagined.

I have a dim idea that this is *rather* a dull chapter. I hope you admire my candour. If it is, I can only plead "extenuating circumstances." First, it is necessary. Secondly, it is short. Thirdly, I won't do it again. Fourthly, I don't think it *is* so dull after all. My readers may now conclude for themselves to what nation I belong.

CHAPTER V.

JEM'S FIRST SITUATION.

IT so happened that one day Mr. Fitzgerald Dobbs left home for the purpose of going to his father's office, as usual. Fitz had begun to growl a good deal lately, concerning the terrible amount of work "the governor" now expected him to do, contrary to his practice heretofore, which had been to do the work himself, and let Fitz read novels. But now, to that young gentleman's great disgust, much copying and answering of letters was handed over to him to be done while "the governor" either sat in moody thought, or busied himself in calculations which he never showed to his son. If Fitz had not been exceedingly idle and careless, he must have suspected that all was not well; but he never gave himself time to discover anything, but simply got through his work as fast as he could, and left the office. On the fine sunny day in question, however, he never reached the office at all, for he met some friends who were going on a pleasure excursion, and being invited to accompany them, he did so, without even sending word to his father that he proposed absenting himself. Presently a boy came from the

office to Ballydobbs House, with a note for Mrs. Dobbs.

"Send Fitz to me at once. Indian Mail goes to-night, and there are letters to be written in time. Tell him to come, for I will stand no nonsense about it.

"T. H. DOBBS."

"Upon my word, my dears, your papa is becoming a perfect bear," said Mrs. Dobbs to her daughters after reading this missive aloud. "He has no consideration for my nerves, not the least. How am I to send Fitz to him, when I don't know where the boy is?"

"He left home to go to the office," said Dolly, "for I was talking to him in the hall."

"But he did not go," said Belinda. "I was upstairs in my room, watching the officers' drag, with ever so many of them in it, coming along the road; and Fitz met it, and after some talk he jumped up beside Captain Palmer, who was driving, and went with them. I wonder where they were going? Some picnic, I suppose."

"Picnic! and none of us asked! Well, I must say, after the kindness those young men have received here, and the expense I go to entertaining them, I do think this very ungrateful and very hard upon us."

Miranda was ready to cry, and Belinda to scold, but Dolly quietly remarked—

"Don't you know it is the day for Lady ——'s archery meeting? That 's where they are going, you may be sure."

Now as an invitation to these archery meetings was

one of the good things for which the Dobbses longed, and longed in vain, this sobered the family; and Dolly went on to say—

"Shall I see if Jem is in the house, Mamma? He could write these letters for India, and I will run at once and find him."

"Do so, my darling girl," drawled Mrs. Dobbs. "*Go*, you need not *run*, Dorothea; and do not speak so quick. It is *not* genteel," added the would-be fine lady. Dolly was too well used to these remarks to feel amused by them, and she tried hard not to be annoyed. She went in search of James, and told him of his father's need of help; and poor Jem was quite pleased at the idea of being useful. So off he went, in high spirits.

The Dobbses dined at seven o'clock, and Mr. Dobbs (who, unhappy man, sometimes found a little comfort in good eating) was generally home in good time. James too had a fine, healthy appetite, and was always punctual; but to-day, seven o'clock—half-past seven—eight o'clock, arrived, and still neither of them appeared. Cook was outrageous, Mrs. Dobbs in a state of genteel annoyance, and the young people very hungry! Presently the expected knock was heard, and steps approached. Mrs. Dobbs drew herself up, prepared to deliver a lecture, but to the surprise of the whole party, it was Thomas the footman who appeared, and not the pair of culprits.

"If you please, ma'am, master wants you; he is in his own room. Miss Dorothea, Mr. James says you are to go to him in his room, if you please."

"What can be wrong?" exclaimed Dolly, as she

ran off. But Mrs. Dobbs only turned very pale, and went at once to her husband.

Dolly flew upstairs to Jem's room, and to her further amazement she found him taking all his clothes, books, and other belongings out of his drawers and off his shelves, and arranging them in methodical heaps on the bed.

"What *are* you about, Jem?"

"Packing. Dolly, I'm going away. Help me, Dolly dear, and don't ask me any questions."

But this was asking too much of any girl who ever possessed the organ of curiosity and the use of her tongue.

"Leaving home! Going away! O Jem, where are you going? Why are you in such a hurry? Has Papa got you a situation?"

"No, he has not. I don't know where I shall go. To Manchester first, and try for employment."

"But if you have not got a clerkship why are you going?" persisted Dolly, with wide open eyes and a frightened face.

"That's what I must not tell you, and you must not ask. I have reasons, Dolly—good reasons. You can trust me, can't you? I cannot stay, and besides, my father desired me to leave the house."

"Then I shall go with you, Jem. Trust you! of course I can, and do. Whoever is to blame, it is not you. I know how much you've borne, and now I suppose you cannot bear this, whatever it is. You shan't go alone. I'll go too!"

James laid down the coat he was folding, and took his impetuous little sister in his arms, in order to give her several hearty and by no means genteel kisses.

Then he sat down on the window seat, drawing her down beside him.

"My own kind, warm-hearted darling Dolly!" he said tenderly. "Don't I know you would stand by me to the end of the world? but you can't come with me now, Dolly. Listen to me, and don't put me out, for you know I'm not bright, and if you put me out I shan't be able say what I mean. I have found out —at least, I have come to know something which makes it impossible for me to stay in this house, doing nothing for my own support. It would be wrong of me. If you ever come to know—anything—I will explain all to you, dear. I would do so now, only I promised I would not; and I did not mind promising, because I feel that it is better, and more right, not to tell you. You must be guided by me, Dolly."

"Yes," said Dolly, much divided in her mind between a desire to rebel, and pride in Jem's manly and commanding tone; for, woman-like, she thought twice as much of her darling when he took upon himself to give her orders. "Yes, Jem; only, if it is right for you to go, is it right for me to stay?"

"I am *sure* it is. By-and-by, Dolly, you will come to me."

"Jem," cried the girl, who being given to reading works of fiction, had various wild ideas founded on her favourite tales floating in her head, "Jem, is it *possible* you 've discovered that you 're not his son—not Papa's and Mamma's child? Oh, is it that?"

"No, you little goose," said James, half laughing. "That's all right, never fear. You must not question me, Dolly, only just believe me, I am not to blame;

"Then she helped him to pack up his goods, too much taken by surprise to cry."

Page 65.

and I would give a great deal that you may never know what—what has done it. Dolly, can you get me a trunk? I have my school trunk and a bag, but they won't hold all my things."

Dolly went to her room, and pulled out one of her own school trunks for him; then she helped him to pack up his goods, too much taken by surprise to cry, or even clearly to understand what was happening.

"I shall go to Manchester, and get a situation," said Jem. "If I don't get a good one, I'll write to Granny; she may be able to help me, or at least advise me. But I won't do that if I can help it, for I must not tell her the whole truth."

Everything was soon ready (Jem had not too much to pack up, poor fellow!), so they called a servant, and desired him to get the boxes downstairs, and to call a cab. Then they went down together to the drawing-room, expecting to find the two girls and Harcourt there. But those young people, thinking it a pity that the good dinner provided should be quite neglected, had ordered it in, and were now eating it, leaving the rest of the family to do as they liked. Into the dining-room James and Dolly followed them.

"Why, Dolly," cried Harcourt, "have you seen a ghost? What's up?"

"Jem's going away," said Dolly.

"Without your dinner, James," exclaimed the whole party, "why are you in such a hurry?"

"I couldn't eat, thank you," said Jem, quietly. "Good-bye, Miranda; good-bye, Linda."

He stood looking at the two gaily-dressed girls with a kind of pity and gentleness in his face which they could not understand.

"Oh, good-bye," said Belinda, "I suppose it is beneath the notice of so important a person as you are to tell us why and where you are going; but you need not look so solemn about it, for we don't greatly care; there's no love lost between us, as you know."

"There's no unkindness between us, Linda—at least I hope not. There's none on my side—and when—if you ever want anything that I can do for you, mind I'm your brother, girls, if it was ten years hence—or twenty. Good-bye, Harcourt."

And he went out into the hall again, followed by poor puzzled Dolly.

"Why, what's the matter with him?" whispered Miranda. "I declare he has made me feel quite uncomfortable and nervous."

"Oh, never mind him; he's a fool," said Belinda, shortly.

In the hall James lingered for a moment. The cab was at the door and his boxes were on the top. He looked round at Dolly and whispered—

"Dolly, say good-bye to Fitz for me. I hear my mother's voice in here. I wonder might I go in and say good-bye to her?"

As he spoke the door of Mr. Dobbs' dressing-room flew open, and his mother called out, "Come here, sir."

So he went in, and Dolly with him.

When Mrs. Dobbs had obeyed her husband's summons, she found him pale and trembling, with a look of such abject humiliation upon his face that it was terrible to look at him.

"Mary," he said, "James has—found out—that all is not right."

Mrs. Dobbs sat down dismayed.

"I never thought of that," she cried. "When Fitz never did—so clever as he is, and James so dull."

"He's not so dull, you see. He puts his mind to his work."

"How did it happen?"

"I was in the inner room; he went to my desk for a letter he was to copy, and got hold of a wrong paper, a paper I ought to have burned."

"What was it?"

"You wouldn't understand if I talked for a month," he said impatiently. "You're a fool, Mary, and I'm no better, to tell you all this. I shall get no real help nor good advice from you."

"Well, I'm sure, Tom! as if the whole thing would not have been over, and all of us ruined only for me, long ago. Where is that stupid boy? He must be made to hold his tongue. Couldn't you persuade him that he made a mistake? he was always dull."

"I tried it, but he was too clear for that. He 'll hold his tongue, Mary. You need not fear him. He said himself it was not his place to—expose me. He tried hard to persuade me to sell up everything and start again; but it is too late now—too late. He is going away at once."

"I'm glad of it. I never wish to see his stupid face again; and now that he knows we are in difficulties, he would be twice as grave and tiresome."

"In difficulties!" said Mr. Dobbs. He had told James that his mother knew all, and now felt half inclined to tell her the last, worst part of the story, but she would not let him finish his sentence.

"O Tom, don't make more of it than you need," she said. "Whatever comes or goes, we must hold on until Fitz is married. That won't be very long now."

"If I can—but—yes, it would be a shelter for you and the girls I suppose. Well, James is going, so you won't be annoyed by his grave looks; there he is in the hall now."

Then Mrs. Dobbs threw open the door, and called her son in.

"Mother, I wanted to say good-bye to you," said the lad, gently. "I am going away. My father is angry with me, and it is time I did something for myself, and——"

"I know all about it," said Mrs. Dobbs.

"O Mother! and go on like this," pointing to her rich dress and gold ornaments.

"Hush," she whispered angrily. "Dolly must not hear. You've told her nothing?"

"Nothing," he answered sadly.

"That's lucky. Now go; and remember, if you say one word to any one, you may just bring about what you only fancy now; for it is just nothing but your own stupid fancy. Everything will go right if you will only hold your tongue."

"I will do that, Mother. I don't believe you know the worst. Good-bye. When you want me, send for me. Dolly will know where I am."

Then he kissed his mother and hugged Dolly lovingly, and went out of the room (poor Dolly running after him to see the last of him) without a word or look to his father. Jem would have given much, in after days, that he had taken his father's

half offered hand and said farewell; but his heart was very sore, and in his youth and uprightness he felt as if it was impossible.

He had a few sovereigns, he might have had more from his father, but he would not take it; and the next day he found himself, with a light purse and a heavy heart, in Manchester, half stunned by the noise and constant movement, and very anxious to get employment. Being inexperienced, he had not thought of getting his father to recommend or introduce him, nor indeed, even had he thought of it, could he have brought himself to do so. He had no friends to whom he could apply; he had nothing in the world but a stout heart and a brave determination to take *any* work that offered, and work his way, leaving it to God to send or to withhold prosperity. He bought a daily paper, read all the advertisements, and having made a list of those situations which he thought he could fill, he set off with a modest hope that some one would try him. But, alas! he was met everywhere by the same demands, for a character, security, or a premium. A week went by, another, and his little store was nearly gone, and no situation as yet. There was not a clerkship vacant in Manchester for which poor Jem had not applied, always with the same results. He was beginning to think seriously of working his passage out to Australia, and going to his kind old friend for advice and a start in life, when a letter from Dolly, with whom he kept up a very brisk correspondence, told him that he no longer possessed his good friend.

"Dear Jem, how can I write it to you," wrote Dolly, "when I know you will feel it even more than

I do, and that you are sad and lonely besides? O Jem, dear Granny—dear kind Granny!—she has finished all her work and gone to her happy home, about which she used to talk with such a bright face. She was ill but a very little time, but she did not forget us. She sent her love and blessing to both you and me. Papa got a letter from Mr. Martin, and there was this message for us. Oh, dear old Jem! I am tired with crying; and if I only had you here to cry with!"

This was a terrible blow to James. So few people had ever been kind to him, that his heart clung to those few; and, besides, Mrs. Martin had been the only friend to whom he could apply for help in his present strait. And now she was dead, and he would never get one of her kind, quaint, wise letters again, to cheer and strengthen him. I hope it is no discredit to his manliness to confess that he cried as heartily as even Dolly herself. This news reached him in the evening, and he gave up that night to sorrow; but next morning he counted over his remaining money, and held counsel with himself.

"Mighty little left, to be all that stands between me and enlisting; for I will do that before I'll go home and live on fraud and dishonesty. Only that won't make a home for Dolly, ay, and for more than Dolly! I must not do that, unless I am really certain I can do no better. Well, then, what am I to do now? Go to some other town and try my luck? No use—one place is as good as another. They won't take me without a recommendation, and money paid by my father; and that I won't have. I must look lower, that's all about it. If I can't get a clerkship to begin

with, I'll try for something else—errand-boy, porter, anything. I'll go out now and see what I can do."

Out he went, and into the business streets, where he no longer felt as if he must be run over by the omnibuses and drays, or deafened by the noise. Presently he saw a card in a shop window, "Light porter wanted, apply within," and so far as plunging headlong into the shop without giving it a second look, may be termed applying within, Jem certainly took the card at its word. It was a large, handsome shop, one which did not think little of itself by any means. The first thing Jem did was to beg pardon humbly of a lady against whom he ran in his haste; his first feeling was that of dismay to find that he had knocked the lady's head off! A spruce young man stepped forward, and dexterously caught the falling head, or bonnet, rather; for the lady, though most fashionably attired, was only a wirework affair made to display a suit of fine clothes! What a pity it is when ladies *with* heads put themselves to no better use. Then, with a bow and a smirk, the spruce youth said to the confused and staring Jem—

"It don't matter in the least, sir. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you to-day?"

"It is *not* a lady, then!" exclaimed James.

"No, sir, a dummy, we call them. What did you say you required, sir?" repeated the shopman, feeling sure that this well-dressed young gentleman had not rushed headlong into the shop merely to upset an unoffending dummy.

"I don't want to buy anything, thank you," replied James; "but—there's a card in the window about a light porter, and if I could see Mr. ——"

Here he remembered that he had forgotten to look at the name over the door; but the shopman helped him.

"Mr. Sweetman, sir. He is the real manager now; old Mr. Cross seldom interferes. Mr. Sweetman is in the house; I will send for him."

For, thanks to Mrs. Dobbs' care in providing her dull boy with clothes chosen by herself rather than according to his own lights, this young gentleman had no idea that James could be applying for the place for himself, but thought that perhaps he had a protégé for whom he wished to say a word. So Mr. Sweetman was summoned, and presently appeared; a blandly smiling personage, with quick, suspicious eyes, and (as Jem soon discovered) a way of ceasing to smile blandly and doing something quite different with wonderful swiftness.

"You wished to see me, sir," said he, politely.

"Can I speak to you alone, sir?" said James.

"Certainly—step this way." But something in poor Jem's anxious manner had driven the smile away, and left a hard keen face with very little that was pleasant about it.

"Sir, you want a porter," said James when they had reached a small, well-furnished room, where his conductor stopped and turned to him, "and I want work. I am very strong and not lazy, and if you'll try me I will do my best to please you."

Mr. Sweetman's first impulse was to get rid of this strange applicant with but scant ceremony, but on looking at him again, and noting his good clothes, his watch-chain, his well-made boots, and hands all unused to hard work, he hesitated. He was a long-

sighted man; he used to boast that he had seldom made a mistake, and never missed an opportunity in his life. And if he merely turned this lad out of the house now, and so lost sight of him, he might lose an opportunity; for no one could doubt, he thought, that this was a case of running away, and very likely the parents and guardians were in search of the youth, and would be laid under an obligation to any one who stopped him or gave information of his whereabouts. So he proceeded to deal warily with the case. Seating himself in his well-cushioned easy chair, he eyed Jem steadily for five minutes or so in silence. Jem, dreadfully confused by this proceeding, pulled out his handkerchief and blew his nose, for want of something else to do, "to give himself a countenance," as the French have it; and a very red countenance it gave him, poor fellow. But the handkerchief decided Mr. Sweetman; it was a fine white one, with J. D. worked in the corner in beautiful flourishing satin-stitch by little Dolly's clever hands.

"Young gentleman," said Mr. Sweetman at last, with a kind of paternal severity, "you have run away from school—or from home. Don't deny it; I feel sure of it."

Jem, not being at all gifted with the power of observation, could by no means understand Mr. Sweetman's reasons for coming to this conclusion. He managed to say, however—

"I have left home, sir; but not in secret."

"A family quarrel?" said Mr. Sweetman, inquiringly.

James was silent.

"Come now, young gentleman, be reasonable.

You ask me for employment, but if I am to give it to you, I must know something about you. Tell me who you are, and why you are here, and I'll see what can be done for you. I have been young myself," he added feelingly, "and I know that young people are not *always* to blame where there are differences of opinion."

This sounded promising, and as the speaker pushed a chair towards Jem, he sat down and thought for a moment.

"I would gladly satisfy you, sir," he said, "for it is of great consequence to me to get employment, and I have been trying so hard; but every one wants—what I cannot give. But you seem so kind that perhaps you will be satisfied with what I *can* give. My name is Dobbs, and I am the son of Mr. Thomas Dobbs of Middlemore, and——"

"Mr. Dobbs of Middlemore! why, I know him slightly. I have had dealings with him. A very prosperous man, sir. A man who will be an honour to his native country. He'll die worth a hundred thousand pounds, sir. Not a penny less. What possessed you to quarrel with such a father?"

"I could not help it. I am a good accountant, and write a fair hand, Mr. Sweetman."

"And yet apply for the place of porter?"

"Only when I found there was no use in trying for anything better, when I have no written character, no references, and no money to pay a premium."

"Your father could remedy all that, I should think."

"I could not ask him. I would rather begin low, and if I give you satisfaction, perhaps you will

remember that I have some education and am fit for better work."

"Well now, Mr. Dobbs, I declare I feel for you," said Mr. Sweetman, with a sudden burst of frankness, which would have put an older or a sharper man upon his guard, but which deceived poor Jem. "I do, 'pon my soul. I would engage you at once; I want a hand at the trimming counter; but I must decide nothing without the consent of my senior partner Mr. Cross; and he is not in town at present, so you must give me time. Will you call again—let me see,"—(here he rapidly calculated the time required to write to Mr. Dobbs, and get an answer, allowing for the loss of a post)—"yes, let us say the day after to-morrow—no, the next day, at about this hour? That will be Friday, won't it? Well, then, on Friday morning I shall hope to see you again."

"O sir, you are very kind!" cried simple Jem, with real heartfelt emotion in his voice. "I shall never forget it. I will work hard to please you, sir, if you take me. I am not quick, but I will take *such* pains."

"I hope so—I hope so. Good morning now, Mr. Dobbs—and good-bye until Friday. By the way, should you change your mind in the mean time, you 'll let me know, because until I have settled with you I shall not look out for any one else."

"I shall not change my mind, there is no chance of that. I am only too lucky to meet with so kind a friend. Good morning, sir."

James went home to his tiny attic with his heart full of gratitude and relief. It was some time before he could compose himself to write to Dolly, first to

pour out his very sincere grief for "dear old Granny," and then to tell her of his new hope.

Mr. Sweetman watched his visitor's retreating form, and grinned a little.

"Such a booby!" said he. "Fancy a fellow of that age being so soft as to think that I'm going to take him into the house in this way, not even inquiring why he left home! But I daresay Mr. Dobbs will be able to oblige me in more ways than one if I oblige him in this, so I shall write to him at once."

Which he did, receiving the following reply by return of post:—

"Dear Sir,—I am in receipt of yours of the 18th inst., and have to thank you for it. My son James has left home, as you conjecture, without my consent, though not without my knowledge. He is a headstrong fellow, but experience is the best cure for such lads as he is, and I daresay he will soon be tired of the employment you offer him, and ready to return home. If, however, he remains with you for a year, and then chooses to continue with you, I shall be happy to come to an arrangement with you about him. If he gets tired and returns home before that time, I will gladly pay you for his board, etc., during the time he remains with you. He is a good accountant, and a steady, sober lad; you run no risk in employing him. I wish him to try his own way as he was not satisfied with what I propose to him, but I do not wish to help him openly at present; and you will add to the obligation you have conferred on me if you will not let him know that you have communicated with me.

"I remain, your obedient servant,

"Th. Dobbs."

"Hum!" said Mr. Sweetman, when he had read this letter, which came by the evening post on Thursday. "This is not quite what I expected. An obstinate, troublesome fellow, I suspect; and he is to be allowed to find out that he has made a fool of himself. Very good. I daresay he won't take long to make that discovery. Forty pounds a year, when you must be well dressed, is not luxury, even with your dinner provided for six days in the week; and I've always heard that old Dobbs lives like a prince. However, he may try it. I can always get rid of him if he is troublesome."

So when James, with a beating heart, presented himself to hear his fate, he was informed that Mr. Cross made no objection to the arrangement proposed, and he was accordingly engaged, and entered upon his duties that very day. His gratitude was really touching, and Mr. Sweetman seemed to find it so, for he hid his face in his scented handkerchief to conceal emotion—of *some* sort.

James, if not very bright, was methodical and attentive; and his fellow-shopmen, who were at first inclined to laugh at him for the earnest gravity of his manner, soon found that he pleased the customers as well as any of them, and *some* customers better than they did; for he was as anxious to please the little slipshod girl who rapped her penny on the counter, impatiently demanding "a penny reel o' cotting," as the fine lady who bought expensive fringes or delicate lace.

But in his delight at securing a situation, poor Jem forgot one very important matter. He had but two pounds left, and he had to provide everything he

needed, except his dinner on working days, for nearly three months; for it happened that he was engaged soon after quarter day, and Mr. Sweetman never made any payments except on the appointed days. Some of the men employed, and all the heads of departments, lived in the house; but of course James, as a new-comer, could not expect to be one of these favoured few. He had many an hour's thought over this difficulty, and at last decided that he would make his money go as far as it possibly could; to which end he gave up tea, milk, butter, eggs, in fact, everything except bread and water. The consequence of this meagre fare was that he was so hungry by the time dinner was ready, that his companions watched his performances with awe and amusement. Even bread, however, has to be paid for, and his tiny room had to be paid for too; though he had it on reasonable terms, in consideration of its being an attic with a skylight, which let in but little light, to make up for which, it kept out but little rain! All this was far from pleasant, and many a lad would have given in, gone home, or at least got money from home to make his life easier. But dull Jem had not an inch of "giving in" about him. What was right, according to his light, that he would do, if he starved for it. When his money was actually gone, he thought he must sell his watch and his books; but he would part with none of these until fairly driven to it, but just wait and see how things would go.

CHAPTER VI.

TREASURE TROVE.

IT was in August that James Dobbs entered upon his new life; and on one lovely Sunday, when he had been to church, and had eaten the piece of bread which represented his dinner, a great longing for a breath of fresh sweet air came over him, and closing the book he had been reading, he opened the leaky skylight to look out. Nothing to be seen, however, but grey slate roofs, red brick chimneys, and a remarkably repulsive-looking red cat, which James thought winked at him with offensive familiarity, licking its lips and seeming to say, "I've had a better dinner than you have, you duffer." Jem shut the skylight, for the cat really hurt his feelings; and he went downstairs in search of his good-natured landlady, to whom his first words were, "Let me do that for you, ma'am," for she was struggling with a heavy kettle, trying to put it on the fire; and Jem never saw any woman in want of help without trying what he could do to help her. He would have made a splendid knight-errant, with his single-minded ways and his kind heart. He splashed his boots, need I say; but if he did not mind that, why should we?

"Thank you, Mr. Dobbs. Ah! it 's a fine thing to be young and strong, sir. Time was when I made nothing of a kettle like that 'ere; but times is changed, says the dogs'-meat man."

James looked round—saw no man, and asked—

"Who did you say, ma'am?"

"Law sakes! he 's an innocent creature," ejaculated Mrs. Reid. "No one, sir; it was only a turn of expression, like. Did you want anything, sir?"

For though James lived in her worst attic, and took in nothing but bread of late, his invariable politeness had so impressed Mrs. Reid that she was always most civil to him.

"Yes, I wanted you to tell me what way to go, that I may get a quiet country walk. I don't care to walk about the streets, I get enough of that. Some place where there are trees and grass."

"Well now, it is hodd what different fancies young gents has. There 's the parlours; he 's a bank clerk, and he goes out every Sunday with a *bought* flower in his button-hole, and walks the streets for the pleasure of it. Grass and trees! It 's a long way to the country now, and the smoke kills the trees; but if you don't mind a place being a bit forsaken like, I know where you could go."

She then gave him sundry directions, and as it fortunately appeared that a line of railway ran parallel, first with the streets and then for some distance with the road which he was to follow, Jem felt hopeful about finding his way. Off he set, passed by innumerable dingy little streets, guided by the line of rail; then along a dusty, hot, uninteresting road, and finally reached the entrance to another road, which

seemed to be almost disused. The grass was encroaching on it from both sides, and in place of prim walls and foot-paths, there were high tangled hedges and wild rough grass; but the shade was delicious, and the rough grass pleasant to the feet. Into this road, or lane, as he felt inclined to call it, Jem gladly turned, "Mrs. Reid was quite right," said he; "this is splendid."

He walked on, silently enjoying. Presently a bird sang out clear and sweet in the hedge, and from long habit Jem said "Dolly!" as if she were frisking along beside him as in the good old days at home. They had not been very good days, as we know; but we always forget the unpleasant things when we look back into the past, and Dolly was pleasant, and a darling. Jem did not see at all clearly for some time after that little fit of absence, which perhaps accounts for his failing to keep to the faintly marked track through the grass; he stumbled along, however, until presently his foot struck against something hard; he staggered, caught a branch of bramble to steady himself, which tore his hand, and finally he came down on his face in the grass.

"There now," said he aloud, "that 's just my luck. *Such* a shake; and my hat gone. No, I see it. And my hand bleeding. Now I must tie it up with my handkerchief, and the next thing will be that I shall want to blow my nose. What knocked me down? I 'm sure I was walking along quietly enough."

The fresh track he had made for himself through the rank grass was visible enough; and having picked up his hat, he walked along it, giving the grass several little kicks; and very soon he came

against the hard thing which had upset him. Being in no hurry, he amused himself by dislodging it. No easy task, for whatever it was, it was buried deep in the tangled grass, and, moreover, firmly embedded in the earth. Jem pulled, and shook, and pulled again, for the feel of the still invisible object told him that it was not, as he had naturally imagined it to be, a stone. It was neither so cold nor so hard as a stone, and his curiosity was excited. At last he had it; it came out of its bed with such suddenness that he very nearly got a second fall. What was it, after all? A little box, once covered with leather, the remains of which hung or stuck to it in pieces here and there. There was a small gold plate on the top, with something carved on it, but it was too dirty to be traced. It had a queer pair of hinges, large enough, thought Jem, for a much bigger box, and it had also a lock of preposterous size—all, he fancied, of gold. And, finally, it had been tied round with a piece of cord, the remains of which came away in his hand as he touched it. This was all very mysterious and deeply interesting, and Jem actually forgot how hungry he was as he sat down on a convenient stone to examine his prize. But the interest was greatly increased when the box opened of itself, as he was rubbing the gold plate on the top, and betrayed the fact that the big lock had been forced, and the hinges broken. Inside was a dirty, damp, sodden piece of jeweller's cotton, which James pulled out at once; and beneath it lay an oval locket set in plain gold, one side containing hair, and the other a miniature painted on ivory, quite distinct even now, though spotted and discoloured by damp. Below

the picture was another piece of jeweller's cotton, and Jem, deeply interested, pulled this out also; and with it came a large brooch, made in the form of a crescent, and set with diamonds which seemed to leap out into the light of day with delight, so brilliantly did they flash as he held them up. James knew that if these were real diamonds (and surely anything else would have been spoiled long ago, lying in that damp hole) they must be of great value. How had the box containing these precious things been lost? and to whom did they belong? and what was he to do with them? Well, the first thing to do was to hide them now, lest other eyes might get a sight of them. The contents of the box were replaced without any further examination, though he fancied there was something more in the bottom of it that he had not yet seen. The box was carefully tied up with a bit of cord which he happened to have in his pocket, and he walked back to examine the place where he had found it more carefully. The road had never been a very wide one, and had but one foot-path; and it was at the side where there had never been a foot-path that he had been walking. There was a faintly-trodden track, but he had been nearer the hedge than it was, and the place was very damp. He found the hole made by the box again, and saw how deeply and firmly it had been embedded in the ground; so firmly, that force must have been used to drive it down; and looking again at the box, he found that there was a dinge in the oval plate on the top which might have been made by a wheel passing over it. Then he went on his way, rubbing the gold plate, until at last he could see that the engraving upon it was a crest, and a peculiar-

looking one—a swan with wings spread, and carrying a sword in its bill.

"I may as well go home," thought Jem, "for surely I shall meet with no further adventures to-day." Still, as he had not come out for adventures, but for fresh air, he went on a little further. Presently he passed the entrance to a new piece of road, well kept and neat, evidently leading to the town by a shorter way than that by which he had come; and now his own road, though still lonely, was free from grass and seemed less deserted, a high wall bounded it on one side, with trees looking over it, and a little further on he reached a gate—a handsome, old-fashioned gate of open iron-work, with a lodge inside, and a long, straight avenue of big beech-trees, stretching away as far as he could see. The lodge was very pretty, with high pitched roof, lattice windows with the panes almost all broken, a trellis porch nearly pulled down by the weight of the clematis which had run wild over it, and a small garden in such a state that you could not even guess at the original plan, though here and there a rose tree, or some other garden flower, raised its head above the wilderness of weeds.

"And it might be such a nice, cozy little place," thought Jem, indignantly. "Ah, if I had it, and Dolly could come to live there!"

It was getting late, and church began at seven. So Jem let go the bar of the gate by which he had been holding, and withdrew his head from the open space in the flourishes through which he had thrust it, and prepared to return. Some Sunday, he thought, he would set out earlier, and try to climb over somehow,

to walk up into the green gloom under the beech trees. As thus he thought, he raised his eyes to measure the height of the gate, and there, on the stone piers, carved in stone themselves, were two swans with outstretched wings and swords in their great bills. This was a discovery; but Jem had no time to prosecute it further, so he only stared at the stone swans, and turned to walk briskly back into the town.

He went to church as usual, but I confess that he did not find it easy to attend. The thought struck him, "How surprised this grave-looking man would be if I pulled out those diamonds, as he sits there beside me; wouldn't he stare!" And so distracted was his mind that he lost a good deal of the service. It was perhaps as well that he did not, as many a youth with more quicksilver in him might have done, proceed to try the experiment; for there can be little doubt that the grave man would have pointed him out to the policeman at the door, as a "suspicious character," as the saying goes, though surely a suspected one would be more to the purpose; and poor good Jem might have got into trouble. After church he went home, ate his very frugal supper, and went to bed, placing the mysterious box under his pillow for safety.

He woke very early in the morning. If you want to be up early, there is nothing like a light supper for attaining your object; but it was too early to get up, so he lay and meditated—

First, naturally, on his own affairs. Not very cheering to contemplate just then, for his money was all but gone. He must either sell or pawn something; his watch and chain was the best thing, he

thought, both as the most valuable and the easiest spared. Should he speak to Mr. Sweetman, and ask for an advance? Somehow, bland as that gentleman was, he did not like this idea at all. The watch was Dolly's gift, the chain his mother's; but they must go, and that very soon, for he had only a few shillings left. Having come to this conclusion, Jem sat up in bed, and pulled out the box he had found the day before, to have a searching examination of its contents. The miniature came first. It was beautifully painted, of which Jem was no judge; but the face struck him very much. It was that of an elderly man, not remarkably well-looking, and yet there was something about it which made him feel that the person represented had been a man of some consequence. There was a bit of blue ribbon just appearing (for the picture gave little more than the head and face), which would have told most people that this conjecture was correct, for it was the blue ribbon of the Order of the Garter. But honest Jem knew nothing about that, so he merely wondered that this grave, commanding-looking old gentleman should have decked himself with blue ribbon, just as Dolly did on Thursday nights. The gold setting was massive and heavy, probably worth many pounds. Then came the diamond brooch. It was, as I have said before, in the form of a crescent, and the nine stones which filled the broad part of this crescent were of great size, while the beauty of the form and workmanship, the way the horns of the crescent tapered away, each stone just filling its place until the last was a mere spark of light, pleased Jem's eyes greatly. He had often heard his mother and the girls talk of a set of diamonds they

had seen at one of the Middlemore balls, so he knew that they were valuable, of course; but of the immense value of those which he had in his hand he had no idea, for these stones had that peculiar violet tinge which is so rare and so highly prized. How they flashed too, and what a brilliant coloured representation of themselves they cast upon the whitewashed wall as he turned them about. Well, was there anything else in this box of wonders? Yes, one other article, but it was only a thick gold chain, probably belonging to the locket, which had a ring at the top for it to pass through. That was all; so he packed all back into the box again, tied it up securely, and lay down to think.

This box and its contents must, it was plain, belong to the family who owned the place with the beech avenue and the deserted lodge: the crest told him that much. Then the first thing to do was to discover the name of that family. There was no hurry. The loss was not an affair of yesterday, and so Jem, who was of a deliberate turn of mind, was not going to hurry himself unreasonably; and he did not care to take any one into his confidence rashly, as he felt responsible for the safety of the valuables he had found. It was now time to get up, so up he got; and when he had arranged his room and eaten that piece of bread which looked so stale and tasted so good (for he had plenty of a very fine kind of sauce), Jem put the box in his pocket and set off for Broad Street and Mr. Sweetman's shop. First, however, he paid his landlady a visit, and told her how he had enjoyed his walk.

"I came to a place with a great gate and a long

avenue of large trees, Mrs. Reid. Whose place is that?"

"Well, sir, I really disremember. You know I don't belong to these parts at all, only coming here after I was married. And the way I know the road at all was just this. Poor Reid, that's dead and gone—to a better place I truly hope—was that romantic, sir, if you'll believe it, even after we were married, that no place pleased him so well for a walk as that road, because of the trees and the quiet. Even then it was partly deserted, though I think I've been told that the lodge there used to be the principal one to some grand place—only they built a new one on another road. I've surely heard the name, but, as I say, I disremember it. Lord something—he's an earl or a barrow-knight, or something of that kind. And what shall I take in for you to day, Mr. Dobbs?"

"A loaf, if you please; a big one, Mrs. Reid."

"O sir, *do* give yourself something more relishing than bread, and only water to wash it down. Let me get you some tea or coffee, or even cocoa, though it's what I never could touch myself."

"When I'm rich, Mrs. Reid. I can't afford it now."

"More's the pity, then, sir. An empty pocket is a bad thing; but you'll do well yet."

"An empty pocket," muttered Jem, as he walked off. "Little you know, ma'am, how far from empty my pocket is. I suppose I have two or three hundred pounds in my pocket. The only misfortune is, that none of it belongs to me."

Had he said thousands he would still have been much below the mark. I am afraid his family would

have been more than ever convinced that James was indeed dull, had they known that he was carrying about such a pocketful, and yet that no idea of making anything by it, even by restoring it to its owner, had never entered his head; no, not though he wanted money so badly.

During the day James took an opportunity to ask one of his companions if he knew to whom the place he had seen the evening before belonged; and with some trouble and cross-questioning he made out that the place was Warrendale Park, and that it belonged to Lord Warrendale, but that the family did not now live there. The house was shut up and empty, his informant said, and the place was a jolly one for picnics.

James did not in the least know what to do next. He *must* find out how to restore the box to its lawful owner, and the said owner must be either Lord Warrendale or some member of his family; but how to get at Lord Warrendale, or how to find out anything about him, was a difficult problem to poor James, who had no experience to guide him, and who had to be at his post at half-past eight in the morning, and to remain there until ten o'clock at night sometimes. But if he did not know what to do, he at least knew what he ought *not* to do; and so he refrained from consulting Mr. Sweetman, though much tempted to get rid of the responsibility thus. It was not that he consciously doubted his employer's honesty, but several little occurrences made him reject the idea of consulting him.

"If I wasn't such a stupid, I should know what to do," he thought. "Dolly, now, she 'd know in a

moment; but I shan't tell Dolly until I have got rid of the box, for she would talk about it, naturally; and then no one knows what might happen." And he saw, in a kind of vision, his father entreating him to let him have the diamonds. "I wish I had a little more sense," added Jem, disconsolately.

Then the memory of a verse of the Bible, which he had once tried to learn off by heart, came back to him—

"If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth unto all men liberally, and upbraideth not."

"So I will," said James, aloud. And when saying his prayers that night, he asked, simply and directly, to be showed a way out of his difficulty. Then he went to bed; and in the morning, before he was well awake, he bethought himself of the clergyman whose church he attended, an elderly, kind-looking man, and to him he determined to go, and tell him all about the box and his perplexity. However, this could not be done until Sunday, for he could not get away from business during the week. On Sunday, therefore, James went to church rather early, and having determined not to be stopped by his foolish shyness, he walked up to the verger and told him that he wanted to speak to the clergyman, either before or after service. Not knowing the clergyman's name, he could say no more than this, and the verger merely said, "Come this way, sir; Mr. Handcock is here," and led the way to the vestry-room door.

"This young man wants to see you, sir," said he, looking into the room; and then he walked off, and left Jem face to face, not with the elderly

gentleman, for whose advice he wished, but with a pink-and-white faced young person, who did not look as old as James himself; though, as he was a clergyman in full orders, he must have been several years older. He was rather below middle height, a slight, boyish-looking creature with fair, curly hair and a pair of bright, dark eyes, hidden away under spectacles, for he was even more short-sighted than Jem himself. Either the spectacles, or something in himself, gave him an alert and perky air, which put Jem completely out of countenance, and he stammered out—

"You are not—it was not you, sir, that I wanted to see."

"Mr. Moberly, I suppose," answered the young clergyman, in a pleasant, brisk voice. "All right—or all wrong, rather—for he 's gone for a six weeks' holiday."

"Six weeks! Well, I can't wait all that time," cried Jem, in despair. "What on earth am I to do?"

"How can I tell when I don't know what you are talking of?" replied the curate. "Can no one but Mr. Moberly answer you?"

"I don't know Mr. Moberly, sir. I didn't even know his name. I'm a stranger here, and don't know any one; and I'm in a great puzzle."

"Perhaps I could help you. I know lots of people in Manchester—belong to the town, in fact. If it is advice in a religious way that you want from Mr. Moberly, you had better wait for him, perhaps; but if it is anything else, you may as well tell me what it is."

"It is about something I have found, sir. Something of value, I think, and I don't know exactly what to do about it."

"Why did you come to-day—Sunday, you know—about such business as that?" inquired Mr. Handcock, alertly; and then he laughed, to see how "flustered" poor Jem was by the question.

"I am—I can't—get away. I 'm busy all day from half-past eight until after dark. This is the only day I could come. You don't think it wrong, sir?" said James, looking up for the first time after his first scared and hasty glance. And Mr. Handcock, who was a thoroughly good, kind-hearted young man, took a fancy to the honest, gentle face forthwith.

"No," he said, "I don't indeed. I am sure you are not one to think lightly about such things—now, are you? But there 's the bell beginning to ring fast—don't you hear it? I must send you away now, but come back here after service, and we 'll see if I can put you in the right way."

James walked away with a half determination not to come back, for Mr. Handcock's brisk and cheery manner disconcerted him terribly, it was so new to him. He would have lost a good deal if he had not changed his mind, which he did during the sermon; for behold, this bright, boyish-looking curate preached such a vigorous, terse, telling, little sermon that James got quite a different notion of him, and went to stand at the vestry door as soon as the church was nearly empty. Presently out popped Mr. Handcock.

"Oh, here you are," said he. "That 's right. Come along to my lodgings, I live pretty close to the

church, and you can tell me about this affair as we walk; and then we 'll have some grub," added this unclerical young person; at least James fancied that it would have been more clerical to say "lunch."

"You 've found something of value?" said Mr. Hancock, putting on his hat as they gained the street.

"Yes, I found a box with same things in it. And the box has a crest on the lid, and I have found out that the crest belongs to the Earl of Warrendale; and so I suppose the box is his; and I don't know how to send it to him."

"This gets exciting," remarked Mr. Handcock. "Here 's my place; I lodge over a baker's shop, you see, because it 's handy to have one's bread on the premises. Don't break your neck, if you please; there are two steps up, and one down, just outside my door. My patent trap, I call it, because my visitors frequently arrive in the room head foremost, and either abusive or lamentable according to disposition. Hullo! Oh, I say you know, I warned *you!*" as Jem, need I say, tumbled down the step, came against the door like a battering ram, and alighted on his nose just inside the young clergyman's sitting-room. He got up, very red.

"I 'm—awkward," said he.

"So 's the step," said Mr. Handcock, soberly. "You are not hurt, I hope? No; that 's all right then, never mind the door, it 's used to it. What sized box is it that you found? You could not come to a better person than I am, because my mother is Lord Warrendale's aunt, and so you see, I am better in this one instance than Mr. Moberly."

"Are you really, sir?" exclaimed Jem.

"Better than Mr. Moberly? Well, as a general rule, decidedly no."

"Not that, sir—but his aunt—are you——"

"Mr. Moberly's aunt?" inquired the curate, mischievously. "Never mind," he added kindly, "I know what you mean. It is an awful thing to be so shy—very disagreeable don't you find it? I'm not shy, and it's a blessing. By the way, tell me your name."

"James Dobbs. And there's the box," cried Jem, now quite desperate. He was not a bit angry, though Mr. Handcock *had* laughed at him; but he felt that he would never get his story told at this rate. He opened the box, pulled out the contents, and spread them on the green cloth of the little table near which he stood. Mr. Handcock stared.

"Oh, I say, you know," he remarked in a tone of remonstrance; and then was silent, and stared again. "I hadn't an idea that you had found anything of such value," he said presently. "And, do you know, I rather think your discovery will clear up a mystery; for I have a shadowy remembrance of a tale of robbery, and pursuit, and of something of immense value missed from the recovered spoil. What is this? a miniature! Oh, my grandfather himself, beyond a doubt. I remember him very well, though he was an older man in my day, of course. Tell me where you found them, Mr. Dobbs."

"In an old road which leads to a pretty lodge and a gate with crests carved in stone over it, the same as that on the box. Look!"

Being further questioned, he told the whole story, getting quite animated and forgetting his shyness.

And Mr. Handcock liked him better and better. There was such a simplicity and absence of self-conceit about him, in spite of his shyness. His was not the shyness of vanity.

"It is really a curious story, Mr. Dobbs; and it is curious too that you should have missed Mr. Moberly and happened upon me, who am, as I may say, first cousin to those diamonds. Let us have some luncheon now, and then I must go to afternoon Sunday-school, and I shan't have a moment to myself again to-day. But to-morrow I will go with you to Mr. Barlow, Lord Warrendale's agent and solicitor. He is the proper person to apply to, and he shall tell you the story of the robbery if you care to hear it."

"But I cannot go, sir. I could not get leave, I am in Sweetman & Cross's—the great shop, you know, and he does not often give leave, and I am only a new-comer. I'll leave them all with you, if you will allow me."

"No no, you must come to Mr. Barlow. It may be an advantage to you. Could you go in the evening?"

"Not until half-past nine at the earliest."

"O that will do, I'll tell him in the morning that we shall be with him in the evening, I know him very well."

Then he jumped up, desiring Jem to "clear away his treasure trove," and going to a press at the other end of the room, he produced a small tray, and soon filled it with the materials for a very comfortable meal.

"I never disturb the good folks below on Sunday, unless I am driven to it," he said. "Draw up your chair, Mr. Dobbs. I hope you're hungry; I am.

Preaching makes me awfully hungry," remarked this very unconventional curate. Poor Jem was nothing loath, as you may think, and found ham, cheese, fresh bread and good butter, and a glass of good ale, a pleasant change from dry bread and cold water. Moreover, he was beginning to understand Mr. Handcock, and could laugh when asked if "they didn't bake very decent bread in this establishment? and the ale was good, naturally, being Handcock & Haughton's. For you know I 'm a brewer by nature, though a clergyman by education," concluded the curate.

By this time Jem had so forgotten his shyness that he asked if he might go to see the Sunday-school, and the end of the matter was that he—shy Jem Dobbs, found himself teaching a class of small girls, and liking it. That was a most delightful Sunday, and the evening was spent in writing an account of his adventures to Dolly, Mrs. Reid having invited him to write in her cozy kitchen by the gas-light. Jem was not a skilful letter-writer, and his description of Mr. Handcock drew from Dolly the opinion that "he must be a little mad, and I don't think I should like him," but that may have been a little bit of perversity on Dolly's part.

CHAPTER VII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

IT was very nearly ten o'clock on Monday night before James knocked at the door of Mr. Handcock's lodgings, as had been arranged the day before. The evening was damp and chilly, more like October than August, and when Mr. Handcock made his appearance he was wrapped up in a great coat, and wore a thick white woollen comforter. Jem, who had never known a day's ill health in his life, felt rather disposed to laugh (quite privately, for he *looked* very grave, not being sufficiently at his ease for a laugh) at such precautions against a chilly evening. They left the crowded streets after a time, and soon reached a detached house with a lawn and shrubbery, where Mr. Barlow lived. As they were expected, they were at once taken upstairs to a handsome, comfortable drawing-room, bright with the pleasant light of lamps, and sweet with fresh flowers. James glanced round—what *was* the difference between this and his mother's far more costly room? This looked so homelike. In the room were three people: an elderly gentleman, his elderly wife, and a young lady, a tall slight girl, with dark eyes and a most sweet smile. She was Mr. Barlow's only child.

"We had nearly given you up, Frank," said Mr. Barlow, coming forward; then seeing James, he put up his glasses to see if he knew him, and Jem all but burst a blood-vessel, he blushed so terribly.

"We would not come earlier. I told you it was partly on business that I was coming. Not of my own, however. This is Mr. Dobbs, and he has something to say to you that will astonish you not a little, I fancy. Good evening, Mrs. Barlow," and the young clergyman shook hands with the two ladies, and introduced James.

"Robert," said Mrs. Barlow, "if you have business on hands, Agatha and I can go away."

"O don't, Mrs. Barlow," cried Mr. Handcock, "it will interest you both, I know. It 's a curious story. Now Mr. Dobbs, begin: let them hear your adventures," he added mischievously, his eyes twinkling behind his spectacles as he made this most unkind request. James blushed, hesitated, and finally put his hand into his pocket, intending to draw out the box and simplify matters by letting it tell it's own story. But Mr. Handcock stopped him with a look of horror.

"Don't do that! do you think this a disclosure to be made in that careless kind of way? Not at all. You must work them up to a proper state of curiosity first, and prolong the sensation. Tell them first that you have found something, Secondly, *where* you found it. Thirdly, *how* you found it. Fourthly——"

"Sir, you must tell them all that yourself," said James, plucking up a spirit as his tormentor kept looking at him so saucily and yet so kindly. "You know it all—please tell them. You'll—make more of it than I should."

"What is this all about?" said Mr. Barlow, laughing. "Ah, Frank! you're just the same mad boy you always were. I'm beginning to suspect that it is only some trick of yours."

"Base suspicion! I despise it. Mrs. Barlow, I shall address myself to you and Agatha. *You* won't suspect me of being anything but the gravest and least trick-playing of men."

"Only that I never can remember that you *are* a man, Frank," said Mrs. Barlow. "Come, tell us the story, whatever it is. You have raised our curiosity quite enough."

"Very well, I accede to the request of my friend, Mr. James Dobbs, and will tell the tale of his harrowing adventures. Last Sunday—no, it was the Sunday before—Mr. Dobbs went out for a walk. Being of a romantic turn, he sought solitude and—green grass. Do I do justice to your tale, Mr. Dobbs?"

James, who was listening with an admiring smile, and who had not a particle of that miserable kind of vanity which would have made many lads regard Mr. Handcock with wrath and aversion, answered—

"More than justice, sir."

"You don't mean by that phrase to accuse me of exaggeration, I trust?"

"O no, certainly not," said Jem.

"But as it is going to be a long story, we had better all sit down," said Mr. Barlow. "I know of old, Frank, that when once you begin to talk——"

"Now, don't hurt my feelings, or I shall never get on. I'm so sensitive. Well, now we are all comfortable, I shall go on Mr. Dobbs found the desired

greenness by leaving the main road, and turning down the old neglected bit of lane which leads to the old lodge of Warrendale Park. Here it was that Mr. Dobbs, walking absently along (he has not confided it to me, but I am under the impression that he was composing a sonnet)"—here James laughed outright—"he stumbled, and fell, and being of a practical turn——"

"Why, you said he was composing a sonnet," interrupted Miss Barlow.

"And you think that no poet can be practical? Why, I'm a poet myself! Don't interrupt me again, Agatha, unless you really have a suggestion to offer. Being practical, Mr. Dobbs at once tried to discover what the object was, by falling over which he had nearly broken his neck and had seriously damaged the flow of his ideas. And he found, deeply imbedded in the earth, hidden by a rank growth of grass—what do you suppose?"

"A stone," said Miss Barlow.

"I have not the least idea," remarked her father.

"A box. A small box covered with leather, mounted in gold; having on the lid an oval plate, and on the plate a crest."

"What crest?" said Mr. Barlow. "This is very curious."

"This is more curiouser. It is the Warrendale crest."

"Indeed! and was the box empty?"

"No, Mr. Barlow. And what's more, I fancy the contents of that box have been more sought after than anything else I know of, except the North Pole and the philosophers' stone—and perpetual motion, of

course. You may show them the box now, Mr. Dobbs. I have them in the proper state, I think."

James untied his piece of cord, and put the box into the old gentleman's hand; and he opened it, the two ladies coming to the table to look on.

"A picture. Why, bless my heart, Frank, it's your grandfather! This is the miniature—no, it can't be—yes, it surely is though—that was lost in the great robbery before you were born."

"It is; I knew him at once. Just so did he look, just so did he sternly eye my poor mother when she confessed to a low taste for porter. Don't look shocked, Mr. Dobbs, I only mean that she insisted on marrying a brewer."

"He never said a word against it, Frank. But can this really be the lost miniature; how very extraordinary!"

"Don't excite yourself about this, Mr. Barlow, or you'll have a fit when you go deeper into the box."

"Why, is there anything else?" and a hasty pull brought out the diamond brooch; and as it flashed out into the light, the two ladies uttered a little cry of admiration.

"Now, Mr. Barlow, what is that?" said the young clergyman. Mr. Barlow looked at it in silence for some time.

"If my eyes don't deceive me," said he, presently, "this is the famous brooch that was lost in that same robbery. All the diamonds were stolen, and all recovered except this, which is worth all the rest put together. These diamonds are of great celebrity, and of immense value. They belonged to Louis the

Fourteenth once. The old earl was furious about them. How on earth did they come there?"

"I conjecture that one of the thieves was a cunning fellow, and meant to rob his comrades; he must have put these two valuables into the box for his own share."

"And separated from the rest, for they were overtaken in the other direction. You don't think it was buried on purpose, Mr. Dobbs, do you?"

"No, sir. I think it was dropped, and that some heavy cart or carriage went over it. If you look at the box, the gold plate has a mark that might be made by a wheel. But it was quite out of the common track, close to the hedge."

"Maybe the horse the thief was riding or driving kicked just there," said Miss Barlow.

"And he dropped his spoil; it must have been so, I suppose. The party was overtaken by the earl, and his sons, and servants on the other road, and most of them captured. They had a carriage, and in it was most of what they had carried off. Only this miniature and these diamonds were missing. The new lodge and avenue were finished at about that time, and the old one was not wanted. That pretty bit of road is seldom used now. Well, Mr. Dobbs, Lord Warrendale will be extremely pleased to recover these things; he will feel himself under a great obligation to you."

"I am very glad I was able to find out that they belong to him, sir," said James, quietly.

"I shall take them to the bank for safe keeping to-morrow; and for to-night, I'll lock them up in the safe in my study."

"I'll help you, sir," cried Mr. Handcock; and having put the things back into the box, the two gentlemen left the room together.

"I wanted a word with you, Frank. There was an immense reward offered for these diamonds; and I could not decide whether to speak of it or not. Who is your friend?"

"I know nothing but what he has told me himself. He has left his father's house to do for himself. I think the father is rich, but this lad is in Sweetman's shop, and he told me this evening that he finds it hard to get on."

"Well, I must write to Lord Warrendale before I can speak definitely; but he will be liberal, he always is. Will you bring Mr. Dobbs in here as you pass out?"

"That is a plain hint, Mr. Barlow. I suppose we had better tramp."

"You know I did not mean that; but it is getting very late. And now tell me how you are yourself, my dear boy? Not overworking yourself I hope?"

"Of course not. That's not in my line."

"I know that. You are a lazy, take-it-easy kind of fellow; always were. But are you feeling well and strong?"

"As right as a trivet, sir. Well, I'll go and bring my treasure-finder down to you."

He ran up accordingly, and found that the two ladies had contrived to make James describe the finding of the box to them again, and that he was looking quite happy.

"It's getting late, Dobbs. I think we must say good-night."

"O Frank, stay until you have a glass of wine and a biscuit."

"Well, make haste then. Oh! it's here, thank you, Mrs. Barlow. I drink to the health of Mr. James Dobbs, and may he go on as he has begun, finding diamonds in every lane, and lost noblemen under every stone."

James laughed, and said, "I hope not, for really it has been a weight on my mind. I could not find out how to get rid of them. Good-night, Mrs. Barlow—I am sure it is very late."

James had finished his glass of wine and a biscuit; he would gladly have had more biscuit, but the idea of what his mother would say if he took more prevented him. The two young men were soon downstairs and in the study, where Mr. Barlow awaited them.

"Mr. Dobbs," said he, "I want to say a word to you before you go; to tell you that you have an undoubted claim to the reward offered for the recovery of these diamonds. I forget now how much it was, but as soon as I can hear from Lord Warrendale I shall be ready to pay over the money to you."

Mr. Handcock was watching his new friend narrowly, and James rose greatly in his esteem, when, without any show of annoyance, or pride, or anything save simple straightforward honesty, he answered—

"O no, Mr. Barlow, I should be sorry that anything was said about that. It was just an accident my finding the box. You will oblige me by saying nothing to Lord Warrendale about a reward; I can't take money for just picking up a box."

"But, Dobbs," said the curate, "remember what

you told me as we walked up here; that you are only just beginning the world, and that so far, it has been a struggle."

"And you have no reason to be ashamed to take the money, Mr. Dobbs," put in Mr. Barlow. It is as justly yours as the jewels are Lord Warrendale's."

"But I could never feel that it was," said James. "Please don't say anything more about it. But I will tell you how I am placed, if it is not taking too great a liberty; for you could help me very much indeed. I have got a situation in Mr. Sweetman's shop, and I hope to get on very well; but I had very little money when I left home, and it is nearly all gone now. I only dine at the shop, you know, and there is no dinner on Sundays. Besides, I shall not be paid until I have been there nearly three months, so I really want money very badly. If you will lend me five pounds, sir, and let me pay it back when I can it would be a great help to me."

"I will do that with great pleasure. I don't think I need be uneasy about my money with a lad who really wants money very badly, and who never seems to think it possible that he might turn a penny on the finding of those diamonds," said Mr. Barlow, very kindly. And taking out his pocket-book, he handed over a five-pound note to James at once.

"Don't think of paying me until it is quite convenient," said he. "And if ever I can oblige you in any way, Mr. Dobbs, I hope you will let me know."

"You have obliged me very much; you don't know how much, Mr. Barlow, for I was really in a great difficulty. Good-night, sir, and thank you."

When they were out of the house, Mr. Handcock said—

"I would gladly have lent you that money, Dobbs."

"I never thought of borrowing it until that moment; besides, Mr. Barlow must be very rich."

"And I, being a curate, must needs be very poor; is that it, Mr. Dobbs? Well, as a general rule, I fear you are right; but I'm the exception which proves the rule."

James wondered why, if that were the case, he lived in small rooms over a baker's shop; but he made no remark. Soon afterwards they reached the point at which their roads separated, and here they stopped to say good-night.

"But our acquaintance must not end here, Dobbs; you must come and see me. Come next Sunday after church, and help me in the Sunday-school again."

James promised delightedly, and went home with a light heart. Five pounds! and only that morning he had not had as many shillings. That was the way in which he looked at the matter. It was just as true that some time ago, five pounds would have seemed a small sum to the rich man's son, and many people would have looked at it in that light. But Jem, you know, was dull; so he took the more cheerful view.

This was James Dobbs' first adventure of any consequence, and he certainly missed the opportunity of getting a good sum of money by it. But then he made two friends, for both Mr. Handcock and Mr. Barlow were favourably impressed by his conduct and manner. And he could not have made a better

friend than Mr. Handcock, who had it in his power to make his life much pleasanter and brighter. Mr. Handcock was a really conscientious Christian. Those who knew him but a little thought him odd, and he certainly was a little unconventional in manner; but he was no fool, and his cheerful, whimsical manner, joined to real consideration and good feeling, made him a delightful companion, if he liked you. If he did not, he was apt to speak his mind with considerable candour, which some people thought rude, though it was never rudely done; and which others called eccentric. But he only disliked people for good reasons, and no doubt it did them no harm to hear a little plain speaking, even if they did not like it. When he had succeeded in thawing the frozen surface of poor Jem's shyness, and knew what a good fellow he really was, he was very kind to him, lending him books, taking him to lectures when the hours suited, and brightening his life in various ways. He had got up a night-school for lads, and as Jem's one weekly walk was lost if he went to the Sunday-school, he made him give that up, and take a class on two nights in the week instead. This Jem willingly did, and found himself greatly interested in it, to his own surprise.

During this time, Dolly wrote frequently and lovingly to "her dear old Jem," but her letters were sometimes rather sad. She said, that in spite of her best endeavours, neither Miranda nor Belinda were ever pleased with anything she did; and that though mamma was kind, yet even she sometimes seemed to wish her out of the way, and to find her company a restraint. "And I don't say sharp things now, Jem:

I don't indeed," wrote poor little Dolly; "and it seems hard that now when I try to please them, I cannot, and when I took no pains about it they liked me very well."

Mr. Sweetman was a good deal puzzled by his new shopman. Why a young man who had a comfortable home open to him, with nothing to do, and plenty of amusement, should work away cheerfully and uncomplainingly, doing rather more than any other man in the establishment,—this was a thing which Mr. Sweetman found himself unable to comprehend. He knew that James served him well and faithfully, and yet he did not altogether like him. Nor was James very popular with his companions, though the best among them respected him. It happened when he had been for about two months in the shop, that Mr. Sweetman sent for the six young men who served at the trimming counter, and handed over to them a quantity of worked muslin habit shirts, sleeves, cuffs, and pieces of edging, saying as he did so—

"These have gone out of fashion, and are tossed, as you see. Take them, and make the best of them; anything you can get for them beyond the sum marked on them, you can keep for yourselves."

The price marked was of course not written in plain figures, but in the secret shop-mark, which James had found so difficult to remember at first. This is a very common expedient in large shops for getting rid of unsaleable articles, but I think there can be little doubt that it is a very improper one, for it is really inciting the poor salesmen to—well, I could easily put it into fine language, but plain words are sometimes the best—to tell lies and to cheat. James

did not quite understand the affair, and said nothing. The goods were brought down, and after some consultation between the head of the department and one of the young men, they were marked in plain figures and hung up in full view, but in such a way as to show the least crushed parts of each article. Soon a young lady came in, and asked James for some cotton. He had not the number she wanted, and asked her to take a chair while he went for some. While he was absent she looked about, and soon a collarette and pair of sleeves took her fancy, and she inquired the price; one of the young men answered glibly—

"Only ten and sixpence, miss, for the set. It is a great bargain—a bankrupt's stock. We have just got in a quantity of them."

"Let me see it, if you please."

Mr. Perkins skilfully unhooked it from its perch, still keeping the uncrushed side towards her.

"The newest fashion, ma'am," said he. Then he turned, feeling a touch on his shoulder, and there stood James, looking gravely at him. But poor Mr. Perkins did not in the least understand why; so he winked in reply, and returned to his own post. James laid the cotton on the counter, and said, "This is your number, ma'am. How many reels do you want?"

"Six, if you please. But I am looking at this collarette and cuffs. The set is very pretty, and I think it is cheap; but are you sure it is a new fashion? for I think I have seen some like this long ago."

"It is not new, ma'am. These are being sold cheap for that reason," said James, not paying any

attention to the furious looks of Perkins; "but they are really cheap, and only a little crushed," he added, turning out the crushed side. "If these were new the price would be twenty-five shillings."

"Really—well, they will do very nicely for what I want," said the young lady; and drawing out her purse, she paid for her purchases, and went away.

Nothing could be said to James just then, because the shop was full; but at night, when they were free to use their tongues, the five young men fell upon him with one consent, and gave him what they called "a piece of their mind."

"You might have spoiled the sale of the whole lot," said Smith.

"The notion of saying it was old-fashioned!" cried another.

"But it was," said James.

"That 's no reason why you should say so," said Mr. Perkins. "And you must have heard me tell her it was quite new—making a liar of me."

"Perkins," said Jem, "*I* didn't make a liar of you."

Upon which the storm raged so furiously that Mr. Sweetman himself appeared, to ask what was the matter. It was explained to him by Mr. Smith, the others standing by, Perkins looking deeply injured.

"I had no right to say that," said James, when Mr. Smith wound up by repeating his last remark. "I beg your pardon, Perkins. I spoke in anger, and it was no business of mine. But the young lady asked me the direct question, and I had to tell the truth."

"Let me hear no more of this," said Mr. Sweetman,

grandly. "There must be no brawling and disputing in this establishment. Mr. Dobbs has begged Mr. Perkins' pardon, and there is no more to be said. As to you, Mr. Dobbs, I advise you not to set up for a saint, you won't find it pay; and if you spoil the sale of my goods, I shall let you know what I think of it pretty plainly."

For some days after this occurrence Jem was in great disgrace with his companions, but as he was really obliging and kind to them all, they got over it at last, and only thought him a fool. The goods were all sold in time, but to their great amusement, Jem refused to take his share of the profits. They were now more than ever convinced that he was a fool. But it was a curious thing that the fool was quite cheerful and happy, while these wise and knowing young men felt a little uncomfortable. Mr. Perkins, who had been specially active in the sale, made up his mind to put half a crown into the poor's box on Sunday, which he thought, to use his own expression, "made it square." When Sunday actually came, he contented himself by putting in a shilling, having nearly got rid of his discomfort by that time.

Christmas came, and Dolly sent James all the money her father and mother gave her as a Christmas box; and with this unexpected assistance, added to his own savings, he paid Mr. Barlow the five pounds he had borrrowed. He went to Earlstown Villa for this purpose, having asked permission to leave business early, so that he arrived at Mr. Barlow's door at about half-past seven. The servant said that Mr. Barlow was still in the dining-room, but James sent in his name, and was soon desired to walk in;

and in the dining-room he found, not only Mr. Barlow, but Mr. Handcock, and he thought they looked rather depressed as he entered. However, Mr. Handcock jumped up with all his usual alacrity.

"You here, Jem?" said he.

"Good evening, Mr. Dobbs," said the elder gentleman.

"Good evening, sir. I have taken a liberty in coming at this hour, but you know I am not my own master. I've come to pay the money you so kindly lent me, and to tell you how much it helped me. I am fairly able to get on now, sir—and I shall never forget your kindness."

He took out his pocket-book and counted out the five pounds; a process which took some time, as one pound was in fourpenny and threepenny pieces, and one in shillings and sixpences. Among this small silver, Dolly's three bright new sovereigns looked quite proud; but his two friends thought that the small change told a tale of many a small self-denial, and Mr. Handcock's eyes brightened and softened as he peeped over his spectacles at the tall strong youth counting up his fourpennies so earnestly.

"It's all right," said Jem, having suffered rather a bad moment, owing to a fourpenny concealing itself under a shilling. Little he thought what the fourpennies were saying to the other two, or he would have changed them for gold before he came there.

"Quite right," said Mr. Barlow, "but now mind, Mr. Dobbs, I am in no hurry for this."

"But I'm so glad to be out of debt, sir."

"Quite right there, too. Well, if you ever want a loan you know where to look for it. We are just

going up to tea; come and see Mrs. Barlow and my daughter."

James spent a very pleasant evening, and heard that Lord Warrendale had been greatly delighted about the diamonds, which could not have been found at a better moment, for the young earl was just going to be married. James fancied that when this was said Mr. Handcock sighed; and he thought that none of them seemed in good spirits. Mr. Handcock left the house with him, and as they walked along together, James said—

"I 'm afraid you 're not well, Mr. Handcock?"

"Quite well, Jem; but, old fellow, I 'm in the dumps."

"O dear," said James, stopping short under a gas lamp, and turning his honest eyes, full of sympathy, upon his friend. "Is it that Miss Barlow is ill?"

"Why—do you think she looked ill?" said the curate, quickly.

"I did think so—though she had more colour than when I saw her before."

Mr. Handcock sighed again. Perhaps there was no one else to whom he could have spoken of his anxiety, but Jem's face was so full of sympathy, and his manner so simple, that he never thought about it, but said—

"Yes, she is ill—at least she is very delicate. Her father told me so to-night. She and I have been dear friends all our lives, you see. I was a sickly boy, and many a time has Mrs. Barlow taken me from school, and nursed me as if I were her son, when my own mother was abroad with my sisters. So

Agatha was like a sister to me—and she is very dear to me. We were to have been married early in the new year. But now the doctors say she is very delicate, and must go to the south of France for the rest of this winter, and early spring."

James looked quite downcast.

"Such a sad disappointment," he said; "and she looked sad too. I wish—she had Dolly with her—that would cheer her up."

"Dolly? that's your sister?"

"Yes, but you must not think she is a bit like me. She's the brightest, pleasantest little thing. Well, good-night, Mr. Handcock, I wish I could comfort you—but you don't want it; you are God's servant, and He will comfort you Himself."

"Thank you, Jem," said the curate, grasping his hand. "He will, I know it, but it's good to be reminded. Good-night, my dear old fellow."

So they parted, James going home with his heart full, and wishing very much that Dolly could be there to cheer up poor Agatha, or that he had some of Dolly's bright power of cheering, for the benefit of Mr. Handcock. He let himself in with his latch-key (he was the only lodger so trusted by careful Mrs. Reid), and went up to his little attic; and when he opened the door, he started to perceive that there was a light in the room. And what was his amazement when some one jumped up from the one chair and flew into his arms, crying—

"O Jem! my dear old Jem, here you are at last!" And behold, it was Dolly!

CHAPTER VIII.

POOR LITTLE DOLLY.

JAMES' feelings may be imagined but cannot be described. Dolly! whom he had believed to be safe at home—her comfortable home, as yet, though how long it might be so no one could say. Dolly! of whom he had just been thinking, whose bright face had haunted him all the way up those narrow, steep stairs, here was this very Dolly, in his arms and in tears, simultaneously. Crying was no play, I can tell you, done as Dolly did it! tears ran in rivers down her cheeks, and even down her saucy nose, while she sobbed and choked to an alarming extent. Far from being in a condition to cheer Agatha, she evidently needed cheering herself.

"Dolly, my own pet! Dolly, my little sister, don't cry, dear heart—don't, it hurts me! What 's the matter, dear? How did you come here? You 're not alone, surely?"

"No, Jem," answered Dolly, with a sob which nearly took her off her feet, "not now, for I 'm with you. O Jem, dear, I 've come to you to stay. I have —left home."

"But why, dear?"

"I'll tell you all about it. I do hope you won't think I have done wrong—I couldn't feel sure myself. But do you know, Jem, I'm so hungry, you can't think."

"Hungry, my darling! I'll get you something; Mrs. Reid shall get some tea for you. She 's the most good-natured woman in the world, I do think. Look here, Dolly, lie on the bed while I'm away, for it is cold—I'll cover you up a bit. You must tell me the whole story as we get our supper."

Dolly gladly lay down, for truly the little thing was spent and worn out; and in a very few moments after he had tucked the blanket over her, she was asleep, feeling as safe as possible now that she had found Jem. He ran downstairs to the kitchen at once.

"O Mrs. Reid, *can* you help me? My sister has come to see me, and she is hungry and tired; and I have nothing in my cupboard but bread and cheese."

"Then, sir, I do assure you, you have more than I counted on," said Mrs. Reid, laughing; "for I declare I thought it was bread by itself. What a little *dear* she is, Mr. Dobbs! When she stood before me at the door after knocking and ringing till I *had* to go, though (not knowing) I had truly meant to let whoever it was find their way for themselves, as they could look at the list of lodgers in the hall, without dragging me away from my work,—I meant to be cross, I won't deny it; and she looked up in my face with her pretty brown eyes, and she says, 'Is it here that my brother, Mr. James Dobbs, lives?' and, bless you, sir, I saw it all in a moment."

"Saw what, Mrs. Reid? I don't quite understand."

"Well, sir, if that innocent child (begging parding) had said to me, 'I didn't think to find him in a place like this,' she couldn't have made it plainer than her eyes did. I always knew that you were used to better, sir; but when I saw the dainty little boots and gloves, and the white feather in the hat and sich—I was surer than ever. And I took her upstairs, at her own request, and her eyes grew bigger and bigger every flight we went up; and when I opened your door and said as this was your room—well, she just flumped down, desolate like, on the chair, and she says, says she, 'Oh, my darling Jem!' and I saw she 'd like to he alone, so I only said as how you had your health purely, and the room was sweet and clean though small, and down I came."

"Poor little Dolly!" said Jem to himself.

"Well now, sir," went on the kind landlady, "you take my advice, and you 'll comfort her up nicely. Look here, sir! look at the nice little tray of supper I 've got ready for you; a dish of sliced ham and a pat of butter, and a sixpenny pot of marmalade, and tea I 've made, sir, and even remembered to keep a penn'orth of milk for you! Now you just let me carry this up as if it was your regular supper (which I wish it was, for your sake) and you just say, careless like, that apartments is dear in Manchester—and I 'll make up the bed in the little room oppersite to your own, which it 's a piece of luck 'tis empty; and then to-morrow I suppose she 'll go home, thinking you are not so ill off after all! Now, what do you think of that, Mr. Dobbs? for sure I am you wouldn't have her know how hard you 've fared."

"Now, how did you find that out?" exclaimed James admiringly.

"Bless you, sir, it wasn't hard! *I* don't want for to be peeping and prying and poking; and never did a letter of one of *my* lodgers know the feel of steam, not if it lay before my eyes for hours, and——"

"Steam!" said Jem, interrupting her in the extremity of his surprise. "What should anybody steam a letter for?"

"Ain't he innocent!" exclaimed Mrs. Reid, almost pityingly. "To open them, sir. Servants does it often; and I *have* heard that them as ought to know better—people as lets furnished lodgings and pays taxes—demeans themselves to do the like. But I never did, nor never need, for I find things out by—what's that word now? It's not inquest—no, of course, *that's* the coroner. It's what the showman said the elephant had when he blew at the apple, you know."

"I don't know about that," said James, doubtfully, "and I don't think apples grow where there are elephants; but I think the word you want is instinct."

"So it is, sir—see what 'tis to be a scholar!" (Poor Jem, no one had ever accused him of that before.) "Now sir! the tea 's ready, and up we go."

"Let me carry it, though," said Jem. "Why should you have to go up all those stairs? How nice it looks—you 've been *very* kind, Mrs. Reid, and I 'll settle with you when Dolly is gone."

"You go up, Mr. Dobbs, and say, careless like, 'I 've ordered supper to come up,' and then in I come, and how 's Miss Dolly to know that I don't

have to do it every night? and I only wish I had, sir."

"All in good time, Mrs. Reid. Well—I'll go up then."

Up he ran, and found Dolly fast asleep; and there he stood looking at her until Mrs. Reid opened the door and came in with the tray.

"Laws, the little creetur!" she exclaimed, "look at the eyelashes wet, and the pretty pink stealing back into her cheeks. She's a little darling, sir, she really is."

"Dolly, dear! Dolly—wake up, and have some supper. Come now—don't shut your eyes again, but sit up. Oh, you sleepy little kitten! Look—Mrs. Reid is laughing at you."

"I've just brought up Mr. Dobbs's supper-tray, miss," said the wily Mrs. Reid, rightly suspecting that her kindly deception would be better carried out by herself than by Jem, "and I made bold to make some tea for you."

Dolly looked at the tray and then at James.

"Jem," said she, "do you always have a really good supper like this? for, oh, my dear, you're very thin!"

Jem would have betrayed the secret then and there, but Mrs. Reid answered for him.

"He don't have marmalade, Miss; I added that on your account."

"That was very kind of you," said Dolly, getting off the bed, "and I'm so glad Jem has a kind person to see after him."

Mrs. Reid withdrew, and the other two ate a comfortable meal. James did justice to the good fare,

and then put by the remains very carefully in his cupboard (a proceeding which might have enlightened Dolly, but did not, she was so pre-occupied). Then having brought a second chair from the room on the other side of the passage, he sat down to hear what his sister had to tell him. Poor little Dolly! how much had she found out? and what on earth was he to do?

"Well, Jem, I'll begin my story at the very beginning.—For some days past, Mamma has been in very bad spirits. Papa is away in London. Mamma scolded us if we said she looked ill, but she *did* look ill, and harassed and miserable: and no wonder! They went out yesterday to pay some visits, and Belinda said there was not room for me, so I stayed at home, and was writing a long letter to you, when Robert came in and said there was a 'young person' in the hall, who would not go away without seeing one of the family. He said, in a queer half-angry way, 'I told her Missus is out, but she don't seem to believe me.' So I ran down to see what it all was—O dear! I almost wish I hadn't."

"Why? But go on, dear; I don't want to speak until I know what you have—heard."

"I rather think you know that already, Jem; at least I felt that I understood then why you had left home. This woman—she wasn't a young person by any means, whatever Robert meant by calling her so, asked me to speak to her privately. So I took her into the breakfast room. And then—I really don't remember how she began, but she thought I knew all about it, and then I questioned her—and she is the person from whom Mamma and the girls get all their

dresses; and they owe her nearly seven hundred pounds! O Jem, fancy that!"

"My goodness!" exclaimed Jem, really amazed, "What! all for gowns and things?"

"Yes! and that ruby velvet dress of Mamma's, with the deep lace trimming, cost more than fifty! But what makes me savage is that part of it is for the very things I am wearing. Only the other day Mamma said I must be dressed more like a grown-up girl, and got me lots of pretty things. Well, I said that of course Mamma would pay her at once if she wanted it; I said she must have forgotten; but Mrs. Pynsent said, no, she couldn't have forgotten, because she had been begging and praying for payment for some time. I assured her that it *must* be a mistake, and I promised to get Mamma to send her the money next day—this very day, though I feel as if all this had happened a week ago."

"What did Mamma say?"

"My dear, I said it out before the girls, the moment they all came home, and Mamma was *so* angry. Belinda said, 'Why, Mamma, didn't Papa give you a cheque to pay Mrs. Pynsent before he went away?' Mamma told her not to worry, because she was tired and had a headache, and she went off to her own room, making me go with her. And then she told me I had done quite wrong in interfering in her affairs, and promising that she would pay to-morrow—indeed, she was very angry, and so was I. And I went on questioning and talking, and Mamma told me first one thing and then another, contradicting herself, and crying—and I'm afraid I was saucy, Jem; indeed, I know I was."

"Well, dear, you begged her pardon, and——"

"No, I did *not*," said Dolly, candidly but dismally. "I did quite the other thing; I said at last, 'Mamma, all this is of no use, I am sure there is something wrong. Why did Jem go away? I 'm sure he had found out that we are ruined, and ought not to be living as we do. I insist upon knowing the truth; what has become of the money Papa gave you to pay Mrs. Pynsent?' And Mamma cried, and said I was very undutiful, and indeed so I was, James, but she told me all at last. Papa had given her the money, or most of it; but after he was gone, the butcher came and was very rude, poor Mamma said, and she gave him the money. Papa was to be home to-morrow—that is to-day, you know—and she would try to get more from him."

"Well, my dear, was that all?"

"Not quite. She told me that if I breathed a word of this, or did anything foolish (for I wanted to send back some of my new things that I have never worn to Mrs. Pynsent), I should bring the whole family to ruin; and she said Papa turned you out because you found out, and would not hold your tongue, and that I must be wise and good; but I don't know, can it be right for me to stay there, profiting by it all? *You* would not, you know. And I could not sleep all night, and this morning (would you believe it, Jem?) they all went to another dressmaker and bought gowns, 'to teach that Pynsent a lesson!' they said. And I was so angry that I just walked upstairs, and put on my things, and came to you. I thought I could write and get my things if I stay with you, and I expected to have time to get back this evening

if you—thought I ought to go; but you were out."

"Dolly, what do you think yourself about it?"

"I *really* don't know what to think. *You* left home, you know."

"Not quite for the reason you think. And you are quite different. I am a man, or nearly; able to live hard and do without things, and I ought to be doing for myself."

"And so ought I, and all of us."

"Yes—but I think you ought to wait. My father told me that he only needed time to recover himself and be all right. I dont know—he is very clever, and he knows best, perhaps; but I could not stay. But you know, Dolly, there 's a great difference between *my* leaving home, and *your* doing it. People would think nothing of me; but if you did it, every one would be talking, and you might really bring on ruin—hasten it, at least; and my father may yet retrieve matters."

"O Jem, if I might stay with you! I always was to be your housekeeper, you know."

"But I have not got a house to keep yet! Dolly, I can't deceive you. You don't know what a hard struggle I have had just to live. I shall do well yet, I hope; but if it had not been for Mr. Barlow's kindness in lending me five pounds, I don't quite know how I should have got through this winter at all. And you know I would work for you, Dolly, and that all I have would be yours, but I cannot think that you ought to run into such poverty and hardship, if—until—it can't be helped."

"If it was right for you, it must be right for me. I could work too."

"Well, but my father wished me to go. Now, you know he would not hear of your going."

"Would you have stayed if he had wished it?"

James looked thoughtful.

"Dolly," he said, after a long pause, "I'm so dull, that I'm sure to betray myself. My only plan is to tell you the plain truth, and then I think you'll see that I am right. But first you must promise me to be quite silent; never to hint even to Mamma that you know anything."

"Know anything! why surely there is nothing worse to be known than what I have told you?"

"There is. If that were all—Oh, what a relief it would be! Dolly, there is something much worse. You remember that I went that day to help in the office instead of Fitz. You would not understand how I found it out: it was by accidentally taking up a wrong paper—but I know that——"

He covered his face with his hands, and groaned.

"Jem, *dear*, don't stop there. I see it is something dreadful, but do go on."

"Dolly—he might be transported for it. He will be if it is found out."

"What, Papa transported!" and Dolly's face grew as white as milk.

"He thinks he will be able to replace the money before it is called for; but it is a chance, and if the chance goes against him, it is worse than ruin. I am not sure that he knows for certain that I saw this so clearly,—that I had seen that he was falsifying accounts; but that was not all—he would not let me

speak hardly. He told me that my mother knew everything, but I am nearly sure that she does *not* know this. I fancy he was not certain how much I understood, and only wanted to stop my tongue, and that Mamma only knows that he is in difficulties."

"O Jem, it is too dreadful! O poor Papa! What is to become of us all?"

"You must see now that you ought not to do anything that might injure him. To set people talking now might be ruin. You must go back, Dolly, and wait. It may never come—he may have replaced the money he used; but if it does come, it will be soon. And your place is with Mamma—it will be dreadful for her."

Dolly was very pale, and trembled visibly.

"My poor little dear! I think now I ought not to have told you."

"I am glad you did, Jem. It has made me feel sorry for them, and I only felt angry before. Yes, I must go home. I will beg Mamma's pardon, and try to be very good to her, and perhaps I may be able to coax her to get no more things. Surely we have enough for a dozen women."

"But don't betray what I have told you, for I really don't think she knows it."

"I don't think she does, it would have slipped out yesterday. I'll be careful, Jem. Do you think Fitz knows? He is always in the office."

"I don't know. Poor Fitz! I hope not."

"O Jem, anything would be better than such disgrace. I shouldn't mind being poor—I should be willing to work. But this is dreadful."

"I almost wish I had not told you; but I did not

see how to manage. Now come and see what kind of bed Mrs. Reid has got ready for you: this is the room. Quite near to me, you see. Can you manage here, just for to-night?"

"O yes, I am so tired that I could sleep on the floor; only, I want to cry, Jem."

"Don't do that, dear. It only makes your head heavy and does no good. You must be wise and quiet, Dolly, for you have a very trying time before you. Good-night, my own little Dolly! I'll call you early that we may have our breakfast together."

Poor Dolly did cry very bitterly, in spite of this exhortation; but she did not cry very long, for sleep came to her relief.

James did not sleep well, for he was troubled by serious doubts of the wisdom and "rightness," to use his own word, of having told Dolly his secret. But it was done, and could not be undone, so the best way was to pray that it might do no harm. If the crash ever came, it would surely come soon; so her suspense would not last long. At last he got a little sleep, but he was up early, and made the room look its very best (which is not saying much) before Dolly came in. They had breakfast together, and then James said—

"Now I'll go to Mr. Sweetman, and ask for leave to go and see you off. I would go with you, dear, only it is better not; I couldn't well afford it."

"I have more than will take me home, but not enough, I'm afraid, for a return ticket for you. Jem, you should have told me how poor you are."

"I am sure I ought not! The worst is over now, and though I am glad to have a peep at you, I wish

you need never have known; for I am not a bit the worse, and you know everything has a beginning."

"May I walk to the shop with you? It will be pleasanter to be with you as much as I can, and besides, it is so cold, and the walk will warm us."

"I would have had a fire, only, you see, I have no grate. It's a fine day, though, and the walk will do you good, so come along."

Dolly was soon ready, and while Jem was putting away his bread, etc, she was looking round the little room, making her observations, particularly on the window. Then they went off together to Mr. Sweetman, and whether it was Dolly's black velvet hat and white feather that mollified him, or not, I don't know; but certainly he was gracious, and desired James to take the whole day if he liked.

"Is not that nice?" cried Dolly, when they were again in the street. "Now we'll go to a bookseller's, and find out the hours for the trains, and I'll go by the latest that will bring me home before dark."

"I may surely keep you for an hour or two. Here's a shop—we'll ask to see a time-table. We need not buy it," added Jem, prudently.

There was a train at four o'clock, which would reach Middlemore at half-past five. As Dolly had left a note to say that she was gone to James, she did not think they would be uneasy about her.

"Now," said she, "I have some business to do. Take me to a shop where I can buy a hammer and some nails."

"What for, child?"

"You will see, sir. Here's a shop."

These purchases made, Dolly set off again in the

most business-like way, and presently discovered a small carpenter's establishment, where she further mystified her brother by purchasing some thin, long slips of wood. All these things she made Jem carry home, and then laying aside hat and jacket, and tucking up the sleeves of her pretty dress, she proceeded to fit the wood closely round the leaking window, not interfering with its very limited power of opening, but completely curing the leaks, as Jem found to his comfort when it next rained. Then she drove some hooks into the back of the door, for his things to hang upon; and then she solemnly made him a present of the remaining nails and the hammer.

"Now, Jem," said she, instructively, "if you had made that window tight long ago, you see, you would have been more comfortable. Mind you keep these nails, and put some in if mine come out."

"What a handy housekeeper I shall have one of these days," said Jem.

"Now come and show me the lane where you found the wonderful box, Jem."

Ah, how Jem enjoyed that walk! and how Dolly cried out with delight when he actually found the very hole out of which the box had come. It was full of water, but that did not detract from its interest. Then she lost her heart to the deserted lodge.

"My fingers *itch* to be at that trellis-work, Jem. It 's as well I haven't my hammer and nails here. How pretty I could make that garden. Oh, if you and I might live here."

"It *is* very pretty," said James; "and when I 'm rich—richer, at least—I 'll make Lord Warrendale an offer for it, Dolly."

"Now show me the church you attend, and where that kind Mr. Barlow lives."

"But won't you be tired, dear?"

"Oh, not too tired. It will comfort me a little, when I am at home again, to know what the places you live in look like. I know the shop now, and Mr. Sweetman; and I can't say I like him. Oh, Jem, won't it be nice if we meet Mr. Handcock?"

After visiting the church, they found themselves presently at the gate of Mr. Barlow's house; and while they were lingering there, Mr. Barlow himself came up to them, being on his way home.

"Why, Mr. Dobbs, is this you?" said he.

"Yes, sir, and this is my sister," said Jem, proudly. "She came to see me, and she made me bring her to look at your house, because you have been so kind to me."

Mr. Barlow glanced at Dolly's bright, blooming face, and sighed a little, thinking of his poor, pale Agatha.

"You must come in," he said, "and rest, Miss Dobbs. As to my wonderful kindness, do you know that this brother of yours refused a very handsome sum of money, which was offered as a reward for finding those diamonds long before he was born? And then he borrowed five pounds, and calls it a great kindness."

"And so it was," said Dolly, shyly smiling, and dimpling all over.

"Well, that's a matter of opinion; I knew the money was safe, at all events. Will you come in and see my daughter?" said Mr. Barlow, feeling that the pleasant, cheery little girl must refresh Agatha

somehow. So, as Dolly evidently wished to go, James accepted the invitation, and they went in. Lunch was on the table, and Mr. Handcock made his appearance before they had finished it, so that all Dolly's wishes were gratified. Mr. Handcock peeped at her over his spectacles, and smiled at Jem.

"I don't wonder you thought a sight of your sister would cheer a person up," he whispered. And James glowed all over with delighted pride. When luncheon was over, he moved to go away, but Miss Barlow would not part with Dolly; and as ten minutes' brisk walking would take them to the station, James did not hurry away. When they did depart, Dolly was furnished with a basket containing a great bunch of grapes for her refreshment during the journey; but what she cared about much more was, that the Barlows so evidently liked and respected her "dear old Jem." As the brother and sister ran up the stairs of the terminus, what was their surprise to meet their father, looking harassed and anxious, and very unwilling to meet the eyes of his children.

"O Papa! did you come for me?" cried Dolly. "I was coming home by the next train."

He looked relieved, and said, "Yes, I came for you. I have only just arrived. Well, James—I hope —are you getting on well?"

"I hope so, Father. Dolly thinks now that she did not do right in leaving home, sir; and I'm glad she will have you to take care of her on her journey."

"Oh, she only came to see you! young ladies are so independent now-a-days. This way, Dolly; there 's a train just due. Have you got your ticket? Then I'll go and get it for you."

He walked away, and did not return until the train was just starting. He never looked at James, nor offered him his hand, but just said "good-bye" in a hurried voice, and followed Dolly into the carriage. James went home with a very heavy heart.

Poor little Dolly! what a burden he had laid upon her merry young heart! a burden of watching and fear, which tried even his own steady spirit. And he was fond of his father too, and had been proud of him once; and the look of shame and embarrassment his face now wore saddened him more than even the thought of Dolly.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE CRASH CAME.

OLLY needed all her courage and all her wisdom before she was much older. It was not long before the storm she expected burst upon her family. First came muttering thunder in the distance, warning her—the warning coming from handsome, easy-going, careless Fitz. He offended the young lady to whom he was engaged by not being as attentive to her as she had a right to expect. He did not greatly care for her, though she was a pretty, nice girl, and far above him in the social scale; but he had been talked into the affair by his mother.

It may indeed be doubted whether Fitz had depth or strength enough in him to love anybody very much. Young people talk about "falling in love," and "being *desperately* in love," as if it were as common as the air we breathe. Whereas true love is a very rare, precious, and beautiful thing; and the fact that a young man or girl has the strength of character to be really and honestly in love, is very much to the credit of the said young man or girl, and so far forth as that love is pure and unselfish, brings him or her nearer to the image of Him Who is love.

However, to return to Fitz. The coolness between him and Lucy Darwin frightened Mrs. Dobbs very much. She regarded this marriage as the only chance of providing (in case of the worst) a luxurious home for herself and her daughters while Mr. Dobbs was engaged in retrieving his fallen fortunes, and as a certain provision for her favourite, Fitz. She was therefore both frightened and angry, and in her agitation she let fall some words which Fitz scarcely heard at the moment, but which came back into his mind with unpleasant force the next day. "Ruin," "our only hope," "what *did* his mother mean?" Was it possible that the governor was no longer as prosperous as he had been? He looked awfully down. The poor old governor—very likely he had come to grief in some of these risky speculations of which he was so fond; but very likely too Mamma greatly exaggerated this supposed ill-luck, being a nervous, excitable woman. Things could not be so bad—but he would ask the governor the plain question. With this intention Fitz sauntered to the office; and in a very short time he came back again, with a face full of such angry alarm, that Dolly, who happened to be in the hall, knew in a moment that his turn had come to make some wretched discovery.

"Dolly, where 's your mother?"

"She is out; and so are the girls."

Fitz muttered an angry oath.

"*Don't*, Fitz," pleaded Dolly. "What do you want? Can I do anything for you?"

"No, Dolly, neither you nor any one else, I suspect; unless you will lend me money to invest in a revolver, wherewith to blow out my brains."

"What nonsense you are talking," said Dolly, seeing that one of the gorgeous footmen was near. "Come in here, and tell me what is the matter."

She drew him into the little breakfast-room, of which she had lately taken possession. Her books and drawing lay on the table, but Fitz, throwing himself down on a chair, flung his arms over books and all, never minding what destruction he worked among her paints, as he hid his face with a groan.

"O Dolly, you don't know what a miserable beggar I am!"

"You *do* look miserable," said Dolly, kindly, "but why, Fitz? Is it about Lucy? She will forgive you —for she is very fond of you."

Fitz groaned again.

"Bother Lucy!" he said. "You wouldn't understand, Dolly, if I told you. I should be hours explaining it to you, and I haven't patience for that. Good gracious, what a fool I was to ask questions! I might just as well have had a few weeks or months more of peace and happiness. The governor too—quiet, steady, hard working old *pater*—to have made such a mess of everything. It's very hard lines—particularly on me, as the eldest."

"Fitz, tell me plainly, what have you found out?"

"Nonsense, child. Papa desired me to talk to no one but to my mother."

"Because Mirrie and Linda know nothing; but I do."

"You do! you, little Dolly? And how on earth did you come to know?"

"Never mind—tell me what you know?"

"Why," said Fitz, sinking his voice to a whisper.

"I know that the governor is over head and ears in debt! Everthing has been going wrong with him for some time, and we are in the very edge of a pit, into which we must fall sooner or later, unless some stroke of good luck turns up to save us. It's deuced hard lines, Dolly; but of course it comes hardest on me, as the eldest."

"I don't know that," said Dolly, mentally comparing handsome, clever Fitz, and his way of taking the trouble, with her dear, slow, plain old Jem, not much to Mr. Fitz's advantage, which would have astonished him not a little.

"I don't know that, Fitz. You are a man, and well educated. It will fall hardest on Mamma and the girls."

"I don't know what 's to become of any of us," said Fitz, dismally, passing his fingers through his curly hair until it stood on end, giving him a most distracted look.

"I suppose, though," said Dolly, gently, "you think you must tell——"

"Who? Go on, Dolly. My father bound me down to tell no one. Who do you fancy could help me?"

"It was not that; I was thinking of Lucy Darwin. It would not be honourable, of course, not to tell her. I'm so sorry for you, Fitz."

He laughed aloud. His little sister's idea of honour amused him greatly.

"Oh, you little greenhorn!" he said. "Not tell her? Of course I shall not tell her. My dear baby, if I had had an idea of this, Lucy would have found me much more devoted, I promise you. But now she has gone off to London, on a visit to her most

cantankerous guardian, old Rodgers, and that proves that she was very angry. I did not care so much—for really Lucy is very exacting—but now it 's a different thing altogether. I must get some tin from the governor, and set off after her, do the penitent and despairing dodge, and try to keep things straight until she is of age."

"Fitz! you won't do anything so base!" cried Dolly, indignantly.

"Base! don't be a goose, child. Will you think it base when I offer you all a home, by-and-by? Perhaps you would prefer the poorhouse?"

"I almost think I should! but I can work, and *will!* O Fitz, I am disappointed. I never expected this. I 've often been so sorry to see you allowed to do a dishonest thing without knowing it—and now——"

"And now, my dear, I must commit this fearful iniquity, knowing all about it. I quite agree with you that it was pleasanter to do it blindly—I hear the carriage." He ran to look out. "Yes, here 's Mamma. Well, good-bye, baby; and mind you don't let all this out."

"There 's no danger of that. I have known it for a long time." Poor Dolly, it really seemed a long time, though it was only a couple of months. "But *you* will betray it if you are not more cautious than you were in the hall just now. Robert was listening."

"Was he? I 'll pull his ears for him. We must keep the ship afloat until I 'm safely married, Miss Dolly."

"O dear Fitz," said the girl with tears in her eyes,

"won't you think better of it? It seems to me so dreadful that we should go on deceiving and cheating every one. Could we do worse if we were heathens, who never knew the will of God, or cared to please Him?"

"Don't preach, pretty Dolly," he said lightly; "it's a horrid trick for a girl to get."

Dolly fired her last gun.

"Do you know, Fitz, that James went away—to work hard, and live hard—rather than be a party to this fraud?"

"Dear dull old fellow! Wasn't that like him now? Well, my child, he has his reward in the comfortable feeling of being so superior to the rest of his family. It must be a fine thing to be so good, but a little common sense is more in my line. Good-bye, little Dolly. I must go and speak to my mother. Thanks for your lecture, my dear."

Fitz marched off, and Dolly let him go; for trying to talk seriously to Fitz was very like pouring water into a sieve. She saw her father come in presently, and her soft little heart bled for him, so old and careworn and unhappy did he look. Fitz no doubt got the money he wanted, for he left home the next day, and followed Miss Darwin to London. He wrote to his mother in a few days, that "he had eaten any amount of humble pie, and had no doubt of being forgiven very soon."

Harcourt was paying a visit to an old schoolfellow when all this took place. He was of a much graver, more solid character than Fitz; and had he had the least suspicion of the true state of affairs, he would, without doubt, have contrived to make some provision

for his own future, without even as much thought as Fitz had given to the future of the rest of his family, for he was far more selfish than his brother.

It was the last week in April. Dolly had been working in her garden, sowing seeds and planting out slips—not expecting, indeed, to see them blossom, but glad of the employment and the change of thought. She had put away her gardening tools, and stood shaking the mould from her thick leather gloves, preparatory to going to the house to dress for dinner, when, hearing a man's step upon the gravelled walk, she turned, expecting to see the gardener, but to her surprise it was her father.

"Dolly," said he, "take this letter, and give it to your mother to-night, but not until ten o'clock. You may as well warn her that there is bad news in it."

"O Papa! has it come?"

"It has come. I fought hard, but I'm beaten. I've done my best for your mother and for you girls. Take care of that letter, Dolly, and do as your mother tells you. I have given her full directions, and I'll join her again one of these days, if I can. You're the only person in the house that I can trust not to go into hysterics, but you'll do as I tell you, and hold your tongue until to-night. I shall be out of reach by that time, even if they raise suspicion by making a fuss. But keep them quiet, Dolly, if you can. Stay here for a while; don't follow me in at once."

He kissed her hastily, and went back to the house, leaving her half stunned.

She waited for about half an hour, and then went slowly home through the familiar garden she loved so

well, and which she never saw again save in her dreams. She was so nervous and frightened that she sent an excuse for not appearing at dinner, knowing that her face would make them question her; luckily she did not feel hungry. When it was nearly time for her to deliver the letter to her mother (such a thick, heavy letter it was), she dressed as if for dinner; for Mrs. Dobbs would have been annoyed had she appeared in her morning dress, and Dolly did not want to begin her task by vexing her. Down she went with the big letter in the pocket of her white gown, which was not whiter than Dolly's usually bright and happy face. To her surprise, when she opened the door of the drawing-room, she found Fitz and Harcourt there with the others.

"Why, Dolly, you are as white as a sheet," cried Fitz. "Are you feeling ill, child?"

"No, thank you. When did you both come home?"

Fitz made no answer, but she saw that he was ill at ease. Harcourt said, with a laugh—

"There 's some mystery in it. Fitz got a telegram this morning from my father, desiring him to come home; and I got another, just the same. I fancied some one was ill; but when he comes in he 'll explain matters, I suppose."

"He did not dine at home to-day," said Mrs. Dobbs. "They are all getting ready for the meeting to-morrow about the new town-hall; he 's the treasurer, you know. I daresay that delayed him."

While she was speaking, the clock on the mantel-shelf struck ten. Dolly nerved herself to do her work.

"Mamma," she said, faltering a little, "I'm afraid you need not expect—something has happened, Mamma. There is bad news."

"What do you mean, child?" exclaimed Mrs. Dobbs, suddenly sitting upright in her chair, and speaking quickly and sharply. "Dolly, you know something! tell me at once."

"I met Papa; and he said he was going—away."

"When was this? Why didn't you tell me at once?"

"Because he desired me to wait. He said at ten o'clock I was to give you this letter."

"A letter—give it here at once."

She seized the letter—opened it hurriedly. A second envelope fell to the floor; but she stooped for it before any one else could move, and put it in her pocket. Then she read the letter, her children watching her with alarm, for even the three who were completely in the dark were frightened. Mrs. Dobbs turned very pale as she read. When she had finished the last page, she stared vacantly at her sons and daughters, and then, having begun to read the letter again, she fell back in her chair almost fainting. Miranda screamed, and Belinda ran to call for help; but Dolly caught her by the arm and stopped her.

"Don't, Linda! don't call any one."

"Let me go, Dolly—how dare you?"

"Don't be a fool, Linda," cried Fitz, "do as you're bid; we don't want the servants here."

Dolly ran for water; Belinda seized a fan, and used it vigorously; Mrs. Dobbs sat up and gasped out, "What was it, Fitz? Am I dreaming?"

"Let me see the letter," said Fitz.

"I don't understand it," she moaned. "Shut the doors—lock them; no one must hear a word. Oh, my poor girls! they have had no warning."

"Neither have I," said Harcourt; "but you have, Fitz, and so has Dolly. What is the matter? nothing very serious, I hope?"

"I am afraid it is serious," said Dolly, gravely.

"Read the letter," cried Harcourt, impatiently. "Don't keep us all wondering and waiting. Read it out, Fitz, and then I suppose we shall know the whole."

Fitz locked the door of the outer room, and shut that of the room they were in. Then he took the letter from his mother's nerveless hand, and said—

"Now for it:—

"My Dear Wife,—You have long known that I was in serious difficulties; therefore what I have to tell you now will not come upon you quite by surprise. I am a ruined man, and not only ruined, but disgraced. The money collected for the new town-hall was lying idle in my hands at a time when it seemed to me certain that the use of it would save me, and that I should be able to replace it before it was called for. But I have been more and more unlucky every day, and now unexpectedly the quarrel about the architect is made up, and a meeting called for to-morrow to arrange for beginning the building. This seals my fate. Heaven help me! Two thousand pounds of that money remains in my hands. It is the only money I can lay hands on. I enclose it in English bank notes, for your use and that of my children. I have taken every precaution to prevent the chance of the

money being traced. You may use it without fear; as for me, it is only one crime more. Leave Middlemore before there is any alarm about me, and go, all of you, to San Francisco. I enclose a letter to a man there whom I befriended once, and I don't think he will forget that now, though he is not a man of the best character. He will put the boys in the way of getting on. They are clever boys, and out there, this is a good capital. I will join you there if I live. But take no steps to find me; I can always find you through John Murray. Write a note, to be sent to-morrow morning, to Mr. Churchill, the chairman of the town-hall committee, saying that I am summoned to London on urgent business. This will gain you a few hours' delay, and you must all make the most of it. I can do no more for any of you. Mary, I am a miserable man. God forgive you for your share in this work. I don't want to say an unkind word, my poor woman, but if you had been content without so much grandeur, I might be an honest man this day, able to face all the world, instead of a poor wretch only asking to hide himself.

"Your unhappy husband,

"TH. DOBBS."

It is impossible to describe the scene that took place when this letter had been read. All talked at once; all bewailed themselves in their different ways, except poor Dolly, who sat silent and frightened. Miranda and Mrs. Dobbs did nothing but cry, and were so evidently in no state to make any arrangements, that after a while Fitz, Harcourt, and Belinda, held a whispered consulation. The result of this was

that Dolly was desired to get her mother to bed, and not to let her maid into the room. "Say she is hysterical, Dolly—but for pity's sake don't let any one hear her going on like this. Get her to bed and to sleep if you can." Then Belinda carried off the sobbing Miranda to her room, where she administered a scolding so sharp and unexpected that poor Mirrie ceased to sob, and promised to do whatever she was bid.

Dolly got her mother to bed at last, and sat by her until she slept. Then she went back to the drawing-room, but found it dark and empty, so she concluded that they had all gone to bed. Being very weary and very sad, she crept off to bed too, wondering why she felt so faint and sick; but as she had eaten nothing since luncheon, I think the wonder would have been if she had felt well. However, she soon fell asleep, and had slept for about two hours when she was roused by Belinda, who carried a lighted candle in her hand, and lighted one for Dolly as she spoke.

"Get up, Dolly, you must help us."

"Why—Linda! I thought you had all gone to bed!"

"So we did, but only to get rid of the servants. Make haste now, and dress yourself. Come to Papa's dressing-room."

Poor sleepy Dolly hurried on her clothes, and followed her. They were all there, Fitz, Harcourt, and even Miranda; and under Harcourt's direction (he took the command at once, and they all obeyed him), they packed, and selected, and searched the house for articles of value. There was not much valuable plate in the house, but what there was they

packed up carefully; also such ornaments and small things as could be easily carried away. The girls' handsome wardrobe, plentiful trinkets, and everything belonging to their mother that was really valuable, were all packed or laid ready for packing.

"Why, here's Papa's watch," cried Dolly, perceiving it on the dressing-table. "He must have forgotten it. I 'll give it to Mamma to-morrow."

"Now off to bed," said Harcourt, "I begin to see daylight through the chinks of the shutters. I shall lock this room up. To-morrow night will finish our work, and then we 'll be off. Dolly, wait here till I get you a glass of wine, for you look as if you wanted it. Now mind, you *must* not be ill. No difference must be seen to-morrow in any of us. Mirrie, if you go about with such a frightened face, I 'll do something desperate. Belinda is the only one of you with an ounce of sense. But only let us get one more night, and the creditors are very welcome to all they can get."

"What a spirit you have, Harcourt," said Belinda, admiringly. "Here, child, eat this biscuit. You did not come down to dinner, I remember. Now, Dolly, mind you must look just as usual to-morrow."

Dolly drank the wine and ate the biscuit, for the child was faint from long fasting; and then she went to bed, and lay there thinking. "The creditors." All in that house ought to be theirs; all would fail to pay the tenth part of what they owed. Oh, why had she helped in packing? Why had she been so dull and silly, and what *was* she to do now? They would never listen to her, and she would be dragged off to San Francisco without even seeing Jem again. But

that she would not allow! Jem should know all, and try if he could influence the others. And so Dolly got up very early, and went off with much speed and secrecy to the telegraph office, and sent a message to Jem.

"From Dolly to James Dobbs, at Messrs. Sweetman & Cross, Broad Street, Manchester :—' Come to me at once. I want you.' "

Then she went home, and appeared at breakfast; but after that she fell asleep on a sofa, and forgot her troubles for several hours.

CHAPTER X.

TWO WAYS OF BEGINNING THE WORLD.

JAMES was at his post, very busy, when a "buttony boy" entered the shop with a yellow paper in his hand, and inquired for "Mr. James Dobbs." Poor Jem! he guessed at once that the crash had come—and Dolly wanted him! In a few moments he was at the door of Mr. Sweetman's private room, with a very white face and shaking hands.

"Mr. Sweetman, I have had a telegraph from my sister; there is something wrong at home and she wants me."

"Any one ill?" inquired Mr. Sweetman.

"No—at least I don't know, sir. She only tells me to come."

"And you want leave? Of course, Mr. Dobbs, I should not think of refusing leave to any of my people under such circumstances, and you, of course—though I must say you have been most regular and painstaking—yet of course I don't look upon you as just one of the crowd. Your father's son—the rich Mr. Dobbs—is not likely to continue behind a counter."

"You are mistaken, sir. I have no intention of giving up my situation."

"Now, now, Mr. Dobbs," said Mr. Sweetman, in his most paternal tone, "let me advise you, bear with a few plain words—words against my own interest, for you have given me *great* satisfaction, and if you were really a poor man I should be keeping an eye upon you, with a view to giving you a better post, advancing you by degrees, satisfied that I was securing a valuable assistant; but——"

"Will you really promote me, sir?" cried Jem, his eyes sparkling. "O Mr. Sweetman! you do not know how happy you have made me."

"Yes; if you remain here. I shall soon be making changes. Smith goes to the boot and shoe department next month, and my choice of his successor—head of the trimming counter—lies between you and Perkins. If I give this to Perkins, I shall put you into the counting-house. But my earnest advice to you is, my dear young friend, is this: be reconciled with your father if you have a chance. Of course your sister thinks there is a chance; I don't see for what other reason she can summon you home in such haste. Now don't throw it away, my dear boy."

"No, sir," said James, hastily, his mind still full of his promised rise; "but—I don't want to injure Perkins—but may I reckon on the situation?"

"You wish to be able to tell your parents that you have made your way here? Very natural, very praiseworthy. Yes, you may say that you are pretty sure of it. Good-bye, and *don't* forget my advice."

Now the heads of departments received a much better salary than the assistants, and so Jem felt

that he would be able to do something towards supporting his mother. And if Fitz and the rest undertook that, might not the sweet old vision be realised, and Dolly keep house for him in good earnest? He ran to his lodgings, packed a small carpet bag, and went off to the station. In the street he met Mr. Handcock, and was recalled to a sense of what probably lay before him by his friend's salutation.

"Whither away, Jem? What piece of good fortune has befallen you that you look so bright and cheery?"

"Do I indeed? Then I'm a selfish beast, that's all!"

"Are you, old fellow? Do you know I shouldn't have found you out?"

"Well, but I must be, for they are all in great trouble at home, and yet, because Mr. Sweetman praised me to-day and promised to give me a rise, I must go about grinning!"

"What is the trouble, Dobbs? Illness?"

"I think not. I know nothing but that Dolly sent for me. When I come back——Oh! Mr. Handcock, you don't know how often I have longed to tell you all about everything, that you might say whether I did right or wrong! But when I come back I may be able to speak. I have no right to do so as things stand now."

They had both been walking towards the station all this time, and had now reached it.

"Good-bye, Jem. You'll let me know when you come back?"

"Yes. And oh! tell me, what news from France? How is Miss Barlow."

"Better, and they think of coming home; but I want them to wait. I don't believe the east wind is gone yet, I feel it myself, and of course she would feel it far more."

Jem, who never yet had had reason to know when the wind blew east and when west, stared a little.

"*You* feel it?" he said. "Why surely, sir, you are quite strong and healthy?"

"O very—strong enough. But I know when the wind is in the east, my friend. Hullo! you 'd better run, I see a fellow beginning to close the doors."

Jem fled at speed, and darted into a third-class carriage just in time, quite forgetting to procure a ticket. Nor did he remember this until, in the familiar station at Middlemore, he was asked for it, and had a great piece of work with the ticket-taker, explaining, and paying for his journey.

"Nothing is known yet," he thought. "I should know it if they were looking queerly at me."

He walked on, and was soon at Ballydobbs House. The door was opened by one of the gorgeous men, and all looked as usual. Jem went upstairs, and in the drawing-room he found his two elder sisters, with their bright coloured embroidery in their hands, but with anxious faces as they looked up to see who their visitor was. Belinda whispered to her sister, "It 's James, and he knows nothing, remember." Then she said, aloud, "You here, James! And pray what brings you home?"

"Where is——. How is my mother, and where 's Dolly?"

"I never undertake to answer for Dolly! She 's

making the beds perhaps, or digging potatoes! She has strange tastes."

But though Linda tossed her head in the old way, and Mirrie got up a feeble titter at her sister's wit, Jem knew that they were both ill at ease.

Another knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Fitz.

"What, Jem!" he cried; "what good wind blew you this way? I was going to ask Dolly how I was to get at you."

"You wanted me, then?" said James.

"Yes; we must all help—all sink or swim together. You need not look so black at me, Linda. Jem knows more than we do—at least he has known it longer."

Harcourt came in while Fitz was speaking. "Eh, Jem! glad to see you. Well, Fitz, have you found anything?"

"Nothing but a fourpenny piece on the floor! Not so much as a paper left, nor a book. The governor has made away with them all."

"Has he?" said James, "for I know that he was altering—preparing books to be inspected."

"That must have been while he still hoped to replace the money and keep afloat. I suppose the fact is, he destroyed everything when he gave up, and sent the remains of the money to us."

"Tell me exactly what has happened, Fitz; I know nothing."

Fitz explained; and then Harcourt began, and told him briefly what they intended to do, concluding with, "We mean to get away to-morrow. I have contrived so that we shall get a letter in the morning summoning us to London, to my father; we 'll

set off as if to go there, leave the train at Manchester and get to Liverpool; there 's a boat that will just suit us if we have any luck."

"But you can be so easily traced and brought back," said James.

"It won't be worth any one's while to do that. My father won't be with us, and that is our safety. He has made himself scarce, and having secured two days' start, they 'll be clever if they catch him."

"But if you carry off what remains of that money," urged James.

"We 're not going to tell them that, stupid! My father says in his letter that he has managed so that it can never be traced."

"But you 'll know yourself that it is stolen money," James said, sturdily, "and you 'll never get —clever fellows as I know you both are—you 'll never get on if you begin in this way."

"Jem, you 're a good creature, but don't prose," said Fitz. "I know what you are going to say as well as if you 'd said it; but *don't* say it, there 's a good fellow. We have my mother and the girls to support, our own fortune to make, and all this confounded money to replace, and I'm not going to fool away our only chance for any of your goody notions."

"Surely my mother does not understand what you are doing?"

"My dear fellow, I doubt if she understands anything! She does nothing but moan and cry."

"It is mostly about you, Fitz," said Belinda, "and it does seem a pity that you must go, for, after all, Lucy might——"

"Oh, hold your tongue," Fitz answered, sharply.

"It is all over between Lucy and me. She never quite forgave me, and we quarrelled finally some days ago. I was only lingering in town because home, with this hanging over us, was too dismal."

While he was speaking the door opened slowly, and poor Mrs. Dobbs, supported by Dolly, came in. Such a feeble, washed-out looking creature as she was! Jem's kind heart ached with pity. Dolly placed her carefully in her chair, and then rushed to Jem and hugged him. Mrs. Dobbs did not even desire her to be less demonstrative and more genteel, so low had her spirits sunk!

"Is that James?" she asked querulously. "Well, James, I suppose you know what has happened?"

"Yes, Mother, and I came to see what I could do to help."

"No one can help," moaned the poor woman; "it's all over. I shall never hold up my head again."

"O Mamma!" exclaimed Fitz, "you must have a little patience. Wait and see how soon Harcourt and I—and my father when he joins us—will make a fine fortune. We have a tolerable sum to start us; this Mr. Murray will put us up to a thing or two, and we shall soon be richer than ever. San Francisco's the place for making a fortune."

"But money won't give me back the society, the—the *everything!* that I'm used to. I shall always think it was very cruel of Tom to run such a risk."

"Mother," said James, earnestly, "listen to me for five minutes. What Fitz wants you to do is not honest, Mother. Do, I beg of you, give up everything to the creditors—it is little enough, I fear—and——"

"And go to the workhouse," finished Harcourt.

"No! I can give my mother a home, though a very poor one—a safe, honest shelter—and then let us all work hard until we can support the girls too; you 'll get plenty to do, for every one will think well of you for giving up this money, and be ready to help you. It is hard on the girls, but better than——"

"Borrowing this money; for of course we shall repay it, and so arriving at the same end by a shorter road. Don't listen to him, Mamma, he 's raving."

"Indeed I shall *not* listen to him," said Mrs. Dobbs, with more animation than she had yet displayed. "Your father sent me the money, and the *idea* that I ought to give it up! And surely my clothes and jewels are my own. I 'm sure, when I think of all I 'm losing, one would say that a wild beast would have more feeling than to hint that I have no right to what is left! Of course the boys will make a fortune—they are so clever and well educated that they are sure to do well. Don't say another word, James—you always were a fool."

Poor Jem tried hard to explain that he really could support his mother—that he had been promised a better situation, and had been praised by his employer. No one would listen to him except Dolly, and she, when the noise of many voices had died away, said, "Mamma, if you wanted me to work for you I would do it with all my heart as long as God gives me strength and health; but as things are, I will not go to America. I 'll stay with James and get employment too."

Then, indeed, was Mrs. Dobbs aggrieved; she wept and scolded. But Harcourt and Linda, who were

the leading spirits among them, soon persuaded the rest that Dolly had better stay, as there would be one less to pay passage-money and to be supported, and when she was weary of her ridiculous whim, she could come out to them. So the matter ended in a general declaration that if these two declined to make common cause with their family, the said family would like to be rid of them as soon as possible. Though they would not listen to a word from either of them, yet their disapproving faces—nay, their very presence was a reproach to the rest; and finally Dolly's clothes were packed up hastily, and, her mother having given her five pounds (Dolly longed to refuse it, but was really afraid to do so), the brother and sister went off together, by a late train, to begin life for themselves and struggle on as best they could. Dolly cried over the parting until she had no eyes left worth mentioning, and her face was scarlet and swollen; but of those she left behind, Mirrie and Linda were really glad to be freed from her presence, and Harcourt rejoiced that there was one less to share the spoils. Mrs. Dobbs and Fitz were sorry—she, because Dolly was her only tender nurse when she was ill; Fitz because he was really fond of her, in his lazy way.

By the time the travellers reached Jem's lodgings Dolly was fit for nothing but to go to bed as fast as possible, for her head ached terribly and she felt shaken all over. Next day poor Dolly was very ill, and a slight nervous fever kept her in bed in the little attic opposite his for several days. On the first day of her illness, James went to Mr. Sweetman, and having told him that his sister had come to stay with him, and was not well, he asked if he might remain

with her that day at least. Mr. Sweetman took it for granted that Jem was now received into his father's favour, as his sister was to pay him a visit; and so, although a little surprised at his return to the shop, he gave him the wished-for leave with great urbanity, and desired him on no account to leave his sister until she was quite recovered. Then he spoke again of the promotion he had promised, and desired Jem to consider whether he would not prefer to go into the counting-house; and the master of the establishment went about with a complacent smile on his face, thinking of the good sum of money which the rich Mr. Dobbs would invest in the business for his son, when the time came for offering him a junior partnership!

James, though not clever, had fortunately too much sense to spend money before he had it in his pocket, so he did not even take a third room as a sitting-room, although Mrs. Reid urged him to do so, promising to wait "any time" for the rent. When Dolly, with white cheeks and very big eyes, was yet well enough to leave her room, he carried her over to his, which he had dusted and beautified according to his lights for her reception.

"Well, Dolly, darling, I'm glad to see you look a little more like yourself."

"And I'm hungry, Jem, actually hungry. I began to think I never meant to eat again."

"Mrs. Reid is cooking a chop for you. She *says* she 's a good cook," Jem remarked, doubtfully. "If you only eat one chop in ten days, Dolly, you won't cost me much."

"I shan't cost you anything after the first. I

mean to get work to do. I could teach little children —say, under nine years old. Or I could make dresses—I can work very nicely. You 've not heard from Fitz or Mamma, have you ?"

"No; they won't write for some time, I am sure. I have not heard anything yet, for I could not leave you, but it must be in all the papers by this time. But, Dolly, any work you undertake will only be for a time, I hope. I am promised a better situation, and when I can make you comfortable I shan't let you work—except, of course, to keep our house nice, and you shall cook my dinner when you 're good."

"You are *too* condescending, sir; of course all that will be my first business, Jem. But I should like to earn a little money too. For indeed, Jem, I know the others won't get on. I know they are clever, but they are not steady. And beginning as they do, by such a piece of dishonesty !"

"They mean to pay that back," James said hastily. "Don't let us judge them, Dolly; we need not have anything to say to it if we think it wrong, but their opinion may be different. After all, you know, my father gave them the money."

"Yes, but how did he get it?" said Dolly, quickly. James made no answer.

"Jem, I know you are right," the girl said, after a pause. "I ought not to have said that. But that is why I want to earn money if I can. Mamma is really unable to work, and she may have to come to us for help."

"I believe you are right. We 'll see about it when you are quite strong again."

CHAPTER XI.

JEM'S PROMOTION.

NEXT day Dolly was so well that James only waited to see her eat a good breakfast, and then left her in Mrs. Reid's care and set forth for Mr. Sweetman's shop.

When he arrived there the young men were already arranging the trimming counter, and he observed that Smith was absent, and that Perkins was evidently in command. There was a new young man in the place where Jem had always been posted.

"Good morning, Perkins," said James. "Where is Mr. Smith?"

"Oh!" cried Perkins, looking round at him, "*you* 've come back, have you? Well, I 'm sure! some people have no sense of decency. Mr. Smith? He 's gone to the boot and shoe department, and I 'm head here."

James changed colour, but remembered that Mr. Sweetman had seemed to think he had better go into the counting-house, and no doubt he had so arranged it. Perkins was watching him and grinning maliciously.

"Mr. Sweetman desired me to tell you, if you ever came here again, to go up to him at once."

"Very well," said James, and turned to go. "Now," thought he, "Perkins fancies I 'm in disgrace for having been absent, and how pleased he seems! I think he 's very ill-natured; but he 'll be ashamed of himself when he finds that I had leave, and that I 'm to get a better situation."

So poor Simplicity walked upstairs and knocked at the door of Mr. Sweetman's room.

"Come in," cried that gentleman, and in he went. Mr. Sweetman was reading the newspaper, lying very much at his ease in a great cushioned chair. But when he saw who it was he jumped up, and placed himself with his back against the chimney-piece, from which post he stared hard at poor Jem. And Jem stared at him in no small wonder, so angry and truculent was his countenance, quite different from the somewhat oily blandness of his usual expression.

"So *you* 've come here again!" cried Mr. Sweetman at last, just as Mr. Perkins had said it, only more wrathfully.

"Yes, sir," said James, collecting himself. "My sister is nearly well now, and I can very well leave her, for my landlady is so kind, and——"

"Don't bother me with your sisters and your landladies, sir. I *did* think that you had had the decency to take yourself off and save me the trouble of turning you out. I know the truth now, of course. Yes," seeing James glance at the newspaper, "it is in all the papers; it 's a regular nine days' wonder. Your father seems to have swindled every one he had dealings with, and you are worthy to be his son. You 've

begun well! I never was so taken in before in all my life."

"Mr. Sweetman, what *can* you mean? You can't suspect that I have cheated you?"

"That 's good—that 's really very good," sneered Mr. Sweetman. "Injured innocence and virtuous indignation! Suspect! that 's not the word, sir. I took you into my employment on the strength of a letter from your precious father, the contents of which no doubt you know as well as I do; and now I find instead of being a rich man, able to make it worth my while to do so, he 's a bankrupt and a swindler. I hope they 'll catch him—I hope with all my heart I may see him picking oakum yet!"

"A letter from my father, sir! I never knew he had written to you."

"Of course not. All innocence again. I owe you something, don't I?"

"My quarter is up, sir. But, Mr. Sweetman, I hope you 're not in earnest. I have done my very best, and only the last time I saw you, you spoke of promoting me, and said you were satisfied with me. I have done nothing to deserve your anger, for I did not know anything about this letter from my father."

"I daresay you have done your best, but I simply took you to oblige your father, and now I don't choose to have your father's son in the establishment. You are a dull fellow, and you never showed it more clearly than when you took all I said in good earnest."

"Then," said James sadly, "you were not in earnest?"

Mr. Sweetman laughed contemptuously.

"I was so far in earnest that if your father had paid

down a good sum of money, I was prepared to make a junior partner of you in due time. But I can get twenty better salesmen than you if I want them; and your name 's enough. Who is going to trust a son of Thomas Dobbs? No respectable place of business will give you employment. A quarter, did you say? Ay, you are right. Here 's your money—now go about your business."

James took the money in silence. Gentle as he was, he yet felt keen indignation at the undeserved insolence of his employer. But Dolly! Oh, for little Dolly's sake, he must silence self, and make one effort more.

"Mr. Sweetman," he said in a low voice, "do let me say a few words. Sir, I left home just because I wanted to earn *honest* bread; and I 'm not alone now. The rest are gone abroad, but, trusting to your promises, I thought I could support my sister, and she stayed with me. If you dismiss me, what can I do for her? I beg of you, sir, to let me remain; of course I know you won't promote me, but let me stay as I was."

"How could I ask the other young gentlemen to associate with you?" cried the high-minded Sweetman. "You 'd better follow the rest of your family. It is strongly suspected that they have feathered their nest pretty well; they did not go off empty-handed."

He looked searchingly at James as he spoke, and the poor fellow blushed crimson.

"As you know very well, I perceive," he went on. "After that, young gentleman, I think I need have no fears for you. Good morning, Mr. Dobbs."

James looked at the hard, unsympathising face,

and felt that prayers were in vain. He turned to go; but at the door he paused.

"Will you kindly give me a written character, Mr. Sweetman?"

"Certainly not, sir. You got into my employment on false pretences, and as soon as I find you out, I dismiss you. I really wonder at your cool impertinence in making such a request."

"But I have a right to demand a character, sir," James said steadily, "and I do demand it. You have no right to refuse it."

Mr. Sweetman knew very well that he had now gone beyond what he had a legal right to do, so, although very angry, he sat down and wrote as James desired him; but the poor fellow felt that he had gained very little when he read the short, bald statement of the time he had been in the shop, and that he had behaved soberly and honestly in the discharge of his duties, but no reason was given for his dismissal. However, there was no use in complaining, so he took the paper and went out of the room, saying good-bye as he closed the door. There were hardly any customers in the shop at that early hour, and a crowd of the young men had gathered to see him go by, the wretched history which filled the papers giving them the keenest desire to have a look at poor Jem. Owing to his behaviour about the sale of the damaged goods he was not a favourite, and many joined Perkins in his ill-natured laugh at the dejected look he wore. But he was no coward, if he was no genius; and lifting his head suddenly he walked up to the biggest and burliest of the laughers, and said quietly—

"Did you speak to me, Thompson?"

"No, I didn't," said Thompson somewhat hastily; "I didn't, 'pon my honour."

"Good morning," said James, and walked out with the honours of war, leaving the young gentlemen somewhat disconcerted.

"I really thought he was going to hit me," whispered Thompson; and then, Jem's broad shoulders and long, strong arms being out of sight, Thompson squaring up his portly person said, "Two can play at that game, I can tell him."

"Only you didn't tell him," said Perkins. Then they discussed Jem, his manners, appearance, capacity, &c., and determined *nem. con.* that he was plain, awkward, stupid, and a good riddance!

Jem, meantime, bought a newspaper, and sat down in the shop to read it that he might know the worst that was said. When he had read it he muttered, "I can hardly blame Mr. Sweetman. Why should he think me any better than the rest? He has only my own word for it. Every one will turn against me now. I *have* been deceiving them all, though I couldn't help it. I have been getting people to be kind on false pretences, and now every one will know all this. O Dolly, Dolly! how am I to tell you what has happened?"

Suddenly a remembrance of Thompson's frightened face came into his head, and made him laugh. "Yet I ought to be ashamed of myself! What right had I to bully him, and put myself in a passion? It was very wrong, and I must try to get my temper better under command. Well, Dolly would be surprised if I went home now, so I'll begin to look for a situa-

tion at once. I cannot bear to tell her I've lost this until I've got another."

So he did not go home until quite late, and did not tell Dolly of his misfortune. She saw that he was sad, but believed that it was because he had been reading the paper he brought home, a perusal of which did not raise her spirits either.

James went again next day and patiently applied at every place where a clerk, salesman, or accountant was required. Many said at once that they wanted a person of more experience; and the few who desired him to call again naturally went to Mr. Sweetman to make inquiries, and refused to see him when he went back at the appointed time. A week passed thus, and Dolly, who was getting quite strong again, began to be uneasy at his sad and anxious face. She determined to find out what was wrong; so when tea was over that evening she brought out her needlework.

"Jem, we won't take a walk to-night, because I want a good, serious talk with you. Do you know, Jem, you are getting quite thin and old-looking? There 's a real wrinkle coming in your forehead, and your eyes look so anxious, and don't be vexed, dear, but I think I have guessed why."

Jem started, and ejaculated, "Have you? I mean —no, you are quite mistaken."

Dolly laughed as she laid down her work and went round the table to kiss him.

"Oh, you dear old Jem, you 're not good at keeping secrets. Yes, dear, I've guessed. I think Mr. Sweetman has refused to give you the promotion he promised you, because of all this about poor Papa; and you think that I shall mind the hard life that you

never complained of for yourself, and so you look as mournful as—anything!"

Here she paused to look inquiringly at him, but Jem, knowing that in silence lay his only chance of keeping his secret, held his tongue persistently.

"But I shan't mind it, dear Jem. I won't say that it is pleasant, but it is pleasanter than living in luxury and idleness, knowing all the time—what I knew. And you 'll live it down, Jem, and do well yet. And—now this is the serious part of my talk—I must get work to do, and not be a burden upon you any more."

"You 're no burden. If I had heaps of money I should not grudge it to you."

"I know that very well; but you see you haven't heaps of money. So I got Mrs. Reid to lend me a paper to-day, and I copied some advertisements. Look here: a lady wants a visiting governess for two little girls aged seven and five. She must teach French and music and English; of course I could do that, and I 'll go to-morrow and see the lady."

"You 'll be asked for a reference the very first thing."

"Well, wouldn't Mr. Sweetman,—What! do you think he would refuse?"

"I know he would, dear."

"Jem, is he very cross with you? I 'm afraid you have a good deal to bear. I never fancied that people could be so unjust. Surely it has not been your doing."

"No, but you know how bad it all is; and what I say to myself is, that he had only my own word for it that I wouldn't do the same. You see, it is suspected

that my mother and the rest carried off money, and very likely Mr. Sweetman thinks that we have a share of the plunder. I don't wonder so much at him."

"Then I do!" said Dolly, hotly. "All these months you've been with him, he might know you by this time. And so you don't think he would let me refer to him?"

"He wouldn't have anything to say to you."

"Not if I came to the shop and asked him myself?" said Dolly, mindful of Mr. Sweetman's politeness the only time she had seen him.

"Don't—don't come to the shop, whatever you do; he might be rude to you. He can be very different from what he was the day you were there."

"But there must be some one else. Mr. Handcock, Jem!"

"What can he say, Dolly, dear? Only that he knows me, and indeed hardly that, for I never told him anything about myself. I have not seen him since you came to me either. When I've got work I'll go, but I can't spare time now."

"When you've got work!" exclaimed Dolly, opening her eyes very wide. Jem coloured furiously and stared fixedly out of the window, trying, but without the least success, to look as usual.

"O Jem, is it as bad as that? Did he really send you away? And you've been keeping it secret instead of letting me try to comfort you!"

Suddenly Jem's head went down on the table, and he burst into such a fit of sobbing that it was plain he needed comfort sorely. And it was then he first knew what a true woman, strong in a woman's best and only real strength, little kitten-like Dolly was

becoming. She knelt beside him, drew his head to her shoulder, looked into his eyes with her clear soft gaze, and said, tenderly—

"Our Heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of these things. I know it 's all for me, Jem. My own good Jem! I wish I could talk like dear Granny to comfort you, but I can't, I can only tell you that I 'm not a bit frightened, and that I 'm sure God will help us."

"O Dolly, I was rash when I kept you here! I knew it would be in a poor way, but *this* means actual want."

"What means actual want?" she asked with a smile. "We have had a good meal: we have beds to sleep in: we don't owe any one anything, and we have some money left! To-morrow has not come, and when it does, it will bring help."

"What help?" he said, raising his head.

"That 's right, Jem, sit up and take me on your knee; I 'm glad I 'm not too big to sit on your knee. Am I too heavy, dear? Oh, you need not laugh, I 'm bigger than I look," a remark which certainly did honour to her Irish ancestors, Fitzgerald or otherwise. "Now tell me all, dear, and we 'll make our plans."

James related all his adventures, dwelling sadly on his efforts to get employment.

"How much money have you, Jem?" said she, when he concluded.

"There it is—very little," he answered.

"I have four pounds, you know. Well, now, we have enough to live for some days, and we must get employment before it is gone. Jem, the very first

thing you do to-morrow, go to Mr. Handcock and to that nice old Mr. Barlow."

"What for? They 'll think I want to borrow money again!"

"You can tell them at once that you have enough for the present. But they will get you a place."

"Dolly, I don't expect it. They will know now, or I must tell them, who I am. They 'll think I am like the rest."

"Why, Jem, how *can* they? Have you forgotten about the diamonds? They must know that you are honest, for you proved it then."

"But don't you think it would be mean to remind them of that—as if I was proud of having been commonly honest?"

"O Jem, Jem! who would have suspected you of such a notion? Now the *real* way to look at it is that all this was brought about just that you might have friends when you really wanted them. Things don't happen by chance. Didn't you say to Fitz the other day that if they gave up the money people would esteem them, and that friends were better than money? You won't have to remind them of it; they 'll remember it and help you—I'm sure they will."

"When I tell them I 'm the son of the man the police are searching the whole world for?"

"Yes; I feel they will. You just try now. And get them to find a place for me too, for I want to be at work. We have to save money, you know."

The idea of saving money seemed so very absurd to poor Jem at that particular moment, that in spite of his fears and sorrows he laughed heartily.

"Save money!" cried Dolly, jumping off his knee

and giving him a little shake with her hands on his shoulders. "We won't be content with that! We 'll make fortunes, mind now, I prophecy that. We 'll be rich and happy, and have a pretty house and garden, and all sorts of nice things, if you 'll only go to Mr. Handcock early to-morrow! Tell him your story from the very beginning. Tell him we 'll work at anything, we don't care to be genteel; we 've had enough of that to last our lives, and we 've made a vow against it: we really want to earn our bread honestly. And you 'll see that he 'll get you a situation, and perhaps one for me, too. Now, my dear old boy, I 'm going to bed, and so are you, for you look tired. To-morrow you must go out and seek your fortune."

"O Dolly! I wish I had your hopes."

"I wish you had, dear, because you 'd be happier; but whether you have or not won't change facts, and you 'll see to-morrow! Good-night, dear Jem."

And having uttered this deep truth, without knowing what a deep truth it was, she kissed him brightly and went off to her little room, turning at the door to give him a last smile. Jem went to bed feeling happier than he had done for many days, and Dolly found him fast asleep when, in about an hour, she peeped in to see that he was not sitting up fretting. Then she said her prayers and went to bed, with a quiet confidence that a way out of their troubles would be opened to them.

CHAPTER XII.

JEM'S SECOND SITUATION.

WHILE the brother and sister ate their very frugal breakfast next morning, Dolly chatted brightly about anything and everything, rather than their somewhat desolate condition. But when breakfast was over she began bustling about to make Jem "smart and tidy." She brushed his coat, she smoothed his hat, she mended his gloves, tied his neckerchief, and finally kissed him, and bid him go off with a good courage and tell Mr. Handcock his *whole* story—why he left home, and all.

"Now don't look miserable, darling! take my word for it, we shall get work in time."

"But I've been trying for eight days, Dolly."

"Yes; but you didn't try in the right way, Mr. Jem. To think of your having such a friend as Mr. Handcock and never asking him to help you! What have you been thinking of?"

"Well, you know, they always said I was very dull."

"But you're not—not a bit of it. You don't jump to conclusions, that's all. That's right,

laugh—now kiss me and be off. Shall I throw an old shoe after you for luck?"

James went, but oh, how slowly! Even now he did not like the idea of applying to Mr. Handcock for help. Soon, however, he found himself at the door of his friend's lodgings. The servant said that Mr. Handcock was at home, and would be in his sitting-room in a few minutes, so Jem sat down to wait for him. His courage, which had never been high, died quite away during the ten minutes he sat there alone, staring blankly at a pretty water-colour sketch which occupied a carved stand on the table, not one line of which did he really see. Here was Mr. Handcock; now in five minutes he would know whether all the friends he had hoped were his were—Sweetmans! Yet when he stood up and looked at the curate, his first thought was not for himself.

"O Mr. Handcock, have you been ill?—you look so *very* bad."

"Don't be personal, young man," cried the cheery voice. "Yes, I *have* been ill. You laughed at me for saying I felt the east wind—do you remember? But, in spite of your amusement, I caught cold that day and have had a bad little time of it. And not once have you come near me!" he went on, looking keenly into Jem's face through his spectacles. "But perhaps you only came back to-day?"

"No, I came back the same day," James answered, hurriedly. "But have you had a doctor? You ought, I'm sure."

"A doctor! Bless you, I've had two! If I had died it would have been like the people in the old Scotch song—'no for want o' recipe, of doctor, and of

fee.' I've been duly mustard poulticed, leeched, dosed, stethoscoped, and coddled. And I'm nearly all right again now. But, Jem, I have been anxious about you, and your face tells me not without cause."

"Does it?" said Jem. "But I'm quite well, sir; Dolly has been ill."

"And you've been anxious. Is she all right again?"

"Very nearly. She is here with me."

"Here!" cried Mr. Handcock; "and you've let me keep her on the stairs all this time?"

"Not *here*, but she's at my lodgings, I mean."

Mr. Handcock sat down in an easy-chair—a new addition to his furniture—and looked up questioningly at James, who was so exceedingly nervous that it was impossible not to notice it.

"James Dobbs," said he, "you've something on your mind. Found any more diamonds?"

"No, I have—lost my situation."

"Have you? Tell me how it happened, for it was not your fault I am sure, Jem."

"Mr. Handcock, oh, if I could only tell you and get it over! Do you remember that day at the station I said——"

"That when you came back you might be able to consult me about something, which you could not do until you could speak plainly about your reasons for being here alone and friendless. Yes, I remember. And now, if I'm all wrong you must forgive me, Jem; if I'm right, I'm saving you some embarrassment. When I saw in the paper all that business about Mr. Dobbs of Middlemore, I fancied, your

name being Dobbs, that perhaps I had a key to your mystery."

"Sir, I am his son."

And Jem looked anxiously in the keen young face; but he was not left a moment in doubt. Mr. Handcock jumped up as alertly as if he had never been ill in his life, grasped Jem's hand warmly, and said—

"I guessed it! My dear old fellow, what a time you 've been going through. And did that oily party, Mr. Sweetman, dismiss you on this plea?"

"Yes. It seems that my father, meaning to do me a service, had written to him about me. Mr. Sweetman thought he would pay money to put me into the firm after a while. Then, when I got home that day, I found my father gone, and—I must tell it, though it seems unkind, the rest preparing to leave England with what they could get together. They wanted me to go, and I tried to persuade them to stay and give up everything to the creditors. Dolly agreed with me, and she wished to stay with me. I thought I could support her, as I was promised a better situation; then the poor little thing was ill, and before I could go back to the shop Mr. Sweetman knew all about it, and he said I was stupid and had used him ill, and dismissed me."

"He 's a fool for his pains. It is a pity when a man is well and honestly served and does not know it."

"I 've been trying ever since to get a place, but he won't say a word in my favour, and so that is against me."

"My dear fellow, don't worry yourself about that. I 'll see Mr. Barlow about it, because he knows you;

but if he can't manage, my eldest brother is the head of 'Handcock & Haughton,' the great brewery, you know, and I'll make him employ you."

Poor Jem! he had been much tried, and had borne himself manfully before the enemy, but the ready kindness made a girl of him, and he sat down and covered his face with his hands. Mr. Handcock sat quietly in his big chair and looked quizzically at him.

"What's this for?" said he, presently. "James Dobbs, if I had more strength I'd knock you down; and if I had less prudence I'd try. You've been thinking of me, Francis Warrendale Handcock, clerk, as of a Sweetman. Don't deny it, for I see it in your—ears; for I can't see your face."

"I—felt so down," gasped Jem.

"No wonder, if you seriously believed that all the world were Sweetmen. Now your sister—did she agree with you?"

"No, she made me come to you."

"Nice little girl; she's as good as she's bonny. Well, Jem, I forgive you. Tell me your whole story, old fellow. Why did you leave home at first?"

James choked a good deal when he first began to speak, but he got over it, and in his plain, simple way he told the whole story of his somewhat sad life. His own dulness, Dolly's many perfections, Mrs. Martin's kindness, and his reasons for leaving home, all was told, and on every word he said was the stamp of simple truth. There came such a mist on Mr. Handcock's spectacles that he had to take them off to polish them.

"Well, my dear Jem," he said, after a long pause, "you may make your mind easy about a place of

some kind, for, as I have said, my brother will certainly give you employment if I press it. Still, I rather hope that Mr. Barlow may know of something that will suit you; for you see my brother looks upon me as a harmless lunatic, and though he won't refuse me, he 'll make you begin very low, for you see he does not know *you*, and he never believes *me*."

"I shall not mind that, and neither will Dolly. She bid me say that honest work was all we wanted, for that we 'd had enough of being genteel to last us all our lives."

The curate laughed heartily.

"I can *see* Miss Dolly saying that, with her nice little cock nose in the air and her pleasant eyes dancing. Well, now to business. Is it a fine day, Jem? Warm, and fit for an interesting invalid to take the air?"

"How can I tell?" James asked, with a smile. Would he have believed that morning that he should smile so soon? "The other day I thought it quite warm, and *you* went and caught cold."

"It 's a fine thing to be you," was the reply, given with a nod. "I've been a rickety concern all my life."

"I wish I could——"

"Share your strength with me? I'm sure you would, Jem; but you 'll want it all for Miss Dolly's sake, and—" he made a moment's pause, and then went on quietly, "My Master won't ask me to account for strength, when He saw fit to give me weakness."

"But why do you live in such a street, and in such poor little rooms? Surely it is not good for you."

"I like to be near the church and near my poor

people. I don't tell them that I'm a rich man; if I did they'd be expecting help, and I should never get as near them as I do now, when I'm only a poor curate. And I can see then what will really do good. I want to do all I can, because—though I never feel that it is true—yet they seem to think my working-day may be a short one."

Jem looked at him with such tender admiration that words were needless.

"My own private conviction is that I'm a humbug. I daresay I shall live to be a hundred years old, and then die of eating too much cake at your great grandchild's wedding."

James laughed, and then asked, "How is Miss Barlow? Has she come home?"

"No; she was on her way, but caught cold and was very ill. She's better now, and will be at home in a few days. Then," he added, with his cheery laugh, "she and I will coddle each other. We're a pretty pair, not fit for much else."

"It's mysterious," said Jem, slowly, "but it is surely all right. Good-bye, Mr. Handcock; you don't know how you've comforted me. I must go and tell Dolly that she was right."

"And I shall go to Mr. Barlow's office and see him about it. It *is* a fine day, I can see that for myself, and it is no distance."

James walked home at a very different pace from the unwilling crawl of the morning; and there was Dolly, peeping up through the banisters of the kitchen stairs, whence she commanded a good view of the hall door, and the moment he entered she rushed up and pounced upon him.

"Good news!" she cried; "the sound of your step told me that. Come up and tell me all about it."

But when the story was told, I am ashamed to confess that Dolly triumphed most unkindly over the unhappy Jem; that she ignored a precept of her dear Granny, and said, "I told you so," more than once. Also, she refused to take a melancholy view of either Mr. Handcock's health or that of Miss Barlow.

"It's very funny that they should both be ill in something of the same way," she remarked unsentimentally; "but you'll see, Jem, they'll both get well, and you and I will go to the church to see them married, and we'll wish them happiness very sincerely! I'll never throw away an old shoe again, to have a good supply. And about me, Jem? Did he say he would get a place for me?"

"I declare, Dolly, I forgot that."

"O you selfish creature!" laughed happy Dolly. "You greedy creature, asking for everything for yourself and leaving me to starve. I shan't begin to-day though, for I've cooked such a nice little dinner out of nothing at all. Mrs. Reid is quite amazed at my genius."

Presently she became rather more grave.

"I wonder, Jem, where they all are? I hope they will succeed and pay all that money back. I wish I thought they would be as happy as you and I are going to be."

Meantime Mr. Handcock went to Mr. Barlow's office, and found him there, as he expected.

"My dear Frank, is it prudent for you to be out?"

"I thought I was *in*—your office. Have you heard from Paris this morning?"

"Yes; Agatha is quite well now. They 'll be home early next week."

"That 's good news! I came here to talk to you about that lad—you remember him—who found the long-lost diamonds."

"Of course I remember him."

Then Mr. Handcock told the story which had moved him so much, and which touched the elder man too.

"Poor boy! poor fellow! And that bright little girl, Agatha took such a fancy to her. Well, I shall see Sweetman; not that I doubt the lad, but it is better to do things regularly—better, for many reasons—and it will stop that fellow's tongue. I know something of that man, and don't like him."

"Oily," said Mr. Handcock.

"Just so, and very keen at a bargain, to put it mildly."

"And what will you do for Jem? I would much rather that you got him a place than that I should get George to take him on at the brewery. George would make light porter of him (I don't mean the liquor, you know) just to prove that he thought I believed his story too easily."

"I like that lad; I think very well of him. He behaved so well about those diamonds, and paid the five pounds so soon. I think I shall engage him as copying clerk, and if I find he has capacity for it I 'll raise him by degrees. He is a thoroughly good fellow, and I have no son to push on."

So Mr. Handcock made his mind easy about Jem, for he knew that all Mr. Barlow's clerks were well paid. He went home, and Mr. Barlow set off and

walked to Broad Street to see Mr. Sweetman. Remembering what he had just heard of poor Jem's ignominious dismissal, he determined to let the young men in the shop know what *he* thought of him; so he refused to go to Mr. Sweetman's private room, but begged that gentleman to come to him. Mr. Barlow, as Lord Warrendale's man of business, was a great man with Mr. Sweetman, for Broad Street principally belonged to the earl; so he came down in a trice, smiling quite beautifully.

"Good morning, Mr. Sweetman. I took the liberty of asking you to meet me here; I'm not so young as I was, and your stairs are steep."

Two undoubted facts.

"Pray don't mention it, Mr. Barlow. Can I do anything for you?"

"If you will answer a few questions—that's all I want. I am looking out for a copying clerk, and I wish to engage a young man who was in your service until lately. I know something of him privately, and like him, but I wish to know what you think of him."

"What name, Mr. Barlow?"

"James Dobbs."

"My *dear* sir! Do you know who he is?"

"Yes, I know all about him. You had no serious fault to find with him, had you, while he was here?"

"I—really, Mr. Barlow. I—Perkins, call Smith here—Smith was his immediate superior, Mr. Barlow. Personally, of course, I had but little intercourse with him." "But if I had known," thought he to himself, "that he had a friend in Mr. Barlow, the matter would have ended differently. Why didn't the oaf tell me?"

Enter Mr. Smith with a shoe in his hand, so promptly had he obeyed the summons conveyed to him. "Look sharp," said Perkins, "I can tell you the manager is not pleased. It 's about that young Dobbs." But Mr. Smith had a conscience, though it was blunted on certain points; but he would not injure poor Jem to please Mr. Sweetman.

"Mr. Smith, this gentleman, Mr. Barlow, wishes to know your candid opinion of young Dobbs, who was under you at the trimming counter."

"James Dobbs, sir? A steady, quiet fellow. Not quick, but very attentive."

"You think well of him then?" inquired Mr. Barlow.

"Yes, sir. I think him a good, honest young man. He was not a favourite with us, being new to business, and full of notions about things that are always done. But he is steady and very hard-working."

"Thank you," said Mr. Barlow. Mr. Sweetman cast a look upon poor Smith which boded ill for him the next time he wanted a holiday.

"And, Mr. Sweetman, had you no reason for dismissing young Dobbs beyond that which you mentioned to him—that you believed his father's half-promise to pay you for keeping him would never be kept, and that you would not employ him because of his father's bad conduct?"

"Well, really, sir, the young man is *not* quick. I like a brighter style of person, you see; and I felt that I had been ill-used—and——"

"Not by the young man himself? I understand you to mean by his father."

"Yes—a precious rascal; but of course I more

than suspect that young Dobbs was a party to the deception."

"So far from it, that he left home and began the world single-handed, because, having accidentally become aware of some of his father's peculations, he would receive no help from him. I know this to be true, for circumstances made me acquainted with him some months ago, and I know that he was in actual poverty. However, the matter is of no consequence now, save that, as Mr. Dobbs is to enter my office, I wished that his late companions here should know that he left your service without any imputation upon his character. Good-bye, Mr. Sweetman."

"What a piece of luck for Dobbs," said Thompson to Perkins, when Mr. Sweetman was out of hearing.

"A great rise in the world," said Perkins. "Some people have all the luck! Not but that Dobbs deserves it—he 's a nice fellow, and I always liked him. I wonder where he lives—I 'd like to call and congratulate him."

No one knew Jem's abode, however, so Mr. Perkins could not deliver his friendly congratulations.

"Inconveniently honest," muttered Mr. Barlow. "Well, I shan't complain of that. I hope he may prove to have brains enough to get on. He shall, if he can; but they will do very well for the present."

What joy it was when James ran back next day from Mr. Handcock's, to say that he was to go into Mr. Barlow's office as copying clerk, at a salary of thirty shillings a week! Dolly cried with delight; kissed Jem more times than he could reckon up; ran downstairs to tell Mrs. Reid, and upstairs to brush

his hat once more. When he had left her to go to the office and see Mr. Barlow, she provided herself with pen and ink and sat down to blacken her fingers and make her calculations. She was no great accountant, and her fingers required counting so often, sometimes with a pen in one hand, that they presented an inky appearance before she had finished. However, she arrived at very practical conclusions. First, that thirty shillings a week was better than nothing—a great deal better—but that it was not wealth; so that after a time it would be well for her to get some work too. Secondly, that they could afford to take that third tiny attic, which Mrs. Reid had offered to let them have for one shilling a week, declaring that it was not worth more to her when they had the other two so near it. This room had two great advantages—the window was not a skylight, and there was a tiny fireplace. The window only looked over a confused collection of small and dirty back-yards, but it was better than the roofs and the cats. So when Jem came back from his first day's work he found this little room, as neat as hands could make it, ready for his reception.

"O Dolly, what a good thought! so much nicer than my room. And a table that one can write at—what a comfort! For I have to learn to write this kind of hand—engrossing, do you see—and I brought some home to practise."

"Is it not snug? Only I wish the things were plainer and cleaner. But there 's a fireplace, Jem; you know we really could not go on without one."

"No. Well, Dolly, I think I shall like my new work ever so much better than the shop."

"I should think so!" she answered, laughing. "Tell me all about it."

"Mr. Barlow was so kind! He made me write, and said I wrote a good hand; then set me to copy accounts into a big book, which has to be done ever so neatly. I found out an error in one of the accounts, and he seemed quite pleased. Then he said I must learn to engross, and I brought home this deed to copy, just for practice. Look what beautiful coloured capital letters there are—but I am not to mind those."

"Why, it is something like illuminating. I could do that as nicely as possible."

So when tea was over, they set to work happily to make copies of the deed Jem had borrowed as a pattern. Jem was slow in picking up this new art, but Dolly could do it almost at once, and, having brought her paint box with her, she amused herself by producing copies of the flourishing, sprawling capital letters, which, as she understood illuminating, she found very easy.

CHAPTER XIII.

"ALL WORK AND NO PLAY, JUST AS BAD FOR JILL AS FOR JACK."

DOLLY did not forget her wish to find some employment by which she could add to the small income, which she made go as far as she could, but which certainly did not admit of saving. But Jem objected so strongly to her undertaking anything which would oblige her to be out at hours when he could not be with her, that she did not press it at first. Two months passed away. Agatha Barlow had come home, and Dolly had spent two or three happy days with her, greatly enjoying both the visits and the walks there and back again. The two girls, who had been mutually attracted from the first, were fast becoming friends, and Dolly thought that Agatha was getting quite strong, she was so bright and cheerful when they were together. But Dolly was not going to give up her point so easily, and she made up her mind that the time was come to attack Jem again.

"Jem, lay down the book; it is too dark for you to read any longer."

"Light the candles then," remarked Jem, who

was reading aloud a book lent him by Mr. Handcock. "I want to know what happened next."

"So you shall after tea, but I want a little talk with you now. And you know what the horrid old miser said when he blew out the rushlight, 'We can talk as well in the dark.'"

"But you 're not a horrid old miser."

"Perhaps I 'm a horrid *young* one, for I 'm going to talk to you about money. First though, you must promise me not to think that I am discontented."

"I know you 're not discontented, Dolly. I often wonder at you, so many comforts that you must miss, and yet you never mind."

Dolly did not answer. No one but herself knew, or should know, how sadly the poor child did, in spite of her high courage, miss the luxurious home, the pleasant garden, the varied life of old. She blamed herself for it, she confessed it with tears when she knelt to pray, but so far she had failed to conquer the feeling, though she had concealed it from kind, loving Jem, who would be so sorely grieved.

"Well but, Jem, what I want to say to you is, that I do wish you could get me some regular employment. You don't like the idea I know, but now I have wasted two months, and I see more plainly than ever that it would be better—it would indeed, Jem."

"But, dear child, I cannot bear to think of you obliged to be out in all weathers and at all hours, going about this great, crowded, busy place all alone. You are not used to it, dear; and you 're so pretty that people would—would wonder to see you alone."

Dolly laughed merrily.

"Why, Jem, to hear you one would think that I

was a beauty, instead of just a decent-looking, cock-nosed little girl with a wide mouth. Do you remember how I pouted because Fitz said he could hang his hat on my nose? Poor Fitz! You may make your mind easy about that part of the business, my dear. I shall dress plainly and walk briskly, minding my own affairs, and not looking at any one, and no one will look at me, or say a word."

This very practical and common-sense view of the matter did not commend itself to James, who shook his head sagely, and said that "she knew nothing about it."

"Well, I know this, Jem; I have done my best, and I know we shall never save money unless we earn more than we do now—not to really lay it by, as we said we would. I have saved a little, but you want shirts, and when winter comes you *must* have a warm great-coat, and we shall want coal, and a lamp, and really the week's money wouldn't do more than—than keep us for the week. I do try, indeed."

"You do more than try; I think you the best housekeeper in the world."

"I owe it all to dear Granny. What a wise woman she was. But about the money. Fancy, if we go on like this, only just living on our income, and suppose poor Mamma writes to say that she must come to us, and has no money to come, what could we do? And is it not selfish and foolish to go on without an effort to do more? And one of us might be ill," she added pensively. This argument shook him.

"Well, Dolly, I'll think it over. I'll ask Mr. Handcock what he thinks. He 's so clever, he 'll hit upon some plan."

But to his own great surprise a plan was hit upon in some mysterious way by Jem himself. And if he had suddenly found himself famous as a painter, a writer, or a public celebrity in any way, he could not have been more surprised. He had been turning Dolly's words over in his mind while still mechanically working away at some copying, when *the* idea struck him—struck him so hard, too, that he dropped his pen and looked up at the head clerk so suddenly that the worthy man cried aloud—

"What is it, Mr. Dobbs?"

"Nothing just now, sir; I 'll speak to you presently, if you 'll allow me."

Presently he said, "Mr. Evans, I 'm ready now."

And Mr. Evans, a young man, who sat at the same table as James, took up the lease which James had been copying, and nodded to him to begin. Perhaps you would like to know the kind of place in which Jem now spent so much time, and to have some notion of what he was doing at this moment?

Picture to yourself a large carpetless room with a wide window, the corner part of which was boarded up, and the upper part of which was nearly as little transparent as the boards, owing to a thick coating of dust and smuts. Light came in, but if there was any view it was invisible. The floor was thickly covered with ink-stains; your first idea on looking at them was that some one must have spilt ink-bottles in the corners on purpose, it seemed so little likely that the stains could have got into every corner accidentally. Opposite the fireplace (now empty, as the weather was very warm) stood a large table, with a desk and several large books lying open, and filled

with neatly-written accounts. This was the table for the head clerk, who sat with his back to the wall, and wrote on as easily and accurately as if the other four occupants of the room had been deaf and dumb, a power which Jem was sorely tempted to envy him. He also kept a sharp eye on the younger clerks, and though he permitted a moderate amount of talk, he was quickly heard to call an idler to order. Near the window another table, a long narrow one, held three desks, and at each desk sat a young man, one of them being our friend Jem. On a high stool near the door sat a lad, ready to answer the street-door bell, or Mr. Barlow's bell, or to run out with a message, or to put on coals, or, in fact, to do anything except clean the rooms, which was nominally part of his work. Of the three clerks, one was writing; one (Jem) was reading aloud (in a steady sing-song voice, never making a stop except to draw a breath), the long lease of which he had just finished a copy; the third clerk, having the original lease open before him, cried "Stop!" now and then when he perceived any difference between what he heard and what he saw. Then, the desired correction having been noted in pencilling, Jem took up his song again about "all that and those the dwelling-house, demesne, messuage, rights of way," and so forth, until any one not in the secret may be forgiven for wondering where all the words came from, and why so many are necessary.

Everything must come to an end, however, and so that terrible lease was finished in due time. Mr. Gregson (the chief clerk) said suddenly, without ceasing to write or even looking up—

"Dobbs!"

"Yes, sir."

"How many errors?"

"Three, sir."

"Very good; you 're improving."

Jem set to work to erase the errors and write in the corrections. Four o'clock struck. I forgot to mention that there was a clock in the room, which surely ticked more loudly than any other clock in the world, and which always struck in a violent hurry, as if it had business in the next street, but must strike before it ran off. At the welcome sound of the said clock the two clerks, or rather two of the clerks at the long table, bundled papers, pens, blotting-pads, &c., into their desks, seized their hats, and, with a hasty "Good evening," vanished. The office-boy ran downstairs joyfully to his tea; Jem finished his last correction, and then watched Mr. Gregson's flying pen, until it too came to an end of its day's work. Mr. Gregson closed the big book before him.

"Want to speak to me?" said he. Like the clock, he was always in a hurry.

"Yes, sir. This lease has no capital letters yet— this copy I mean. You give that kind of work out, don't you?"

"Always. And lots of copying too."

"My sister can do it all beautifully, and she wants work of some kind. Would you let her try, sir?"

"*Sure* she can do it well?"

"Quite sure," said Jem, emphatically. Mr. Gregson might have been less impressed had he known that Jem would have answered quite as emphatically

had Dolly's ability to do anything she had ever attempted been called in question.

"Very well; take the lease and the copy. And here's a paper of which I want four-and-twenty copies as soon as I can get them. There must be no blunders, mind. There's paper. Let her try her hand."

"How much do you suppose she could earn in a week, sir?" asked James, knowing that Dolly would ask him.

"What else has she to do? Depends on that."

"Oh, she has everything to do for both of us. But she could work at it for four or five hours a day, I think."

"She 'd earn eight shillings a week if she 's pretty quick. More if she don't make blunders. More still if she can manage the capitals."

"She does them beautifully!" cried Jem, seizing the papers and tying them up neatly. "She 'll be so pleased. Good evening, Mr. Gregson; I 'm very much obliged to you."

"Not at all. You 're steady, punctual, quiet, and painstaking, and I 'm glad to do this for you."

James glowed with happiness at these words, and having now tied the papers securely, he set out for home.

Dolly was sitting in the window of the little sitting-room, with her work in her lap. She was making a shirt for Jem, and had been industrious all day, as any one could see by looking at the shirt; but she was not working now. Jem left her at half-past eight. Her household tasks were over early, and it was very dull and lonely to sit there stitching away

hour after hour. Poor Dolly did not quite know what ailed her, and added a good deal to her sufferings by blaming herself very severely for not being as cheerful and gay as when she had been one of a large family in her old home, with plenty of variety and amusement, and able to spend most of her time in the open air. She missed that, physically; and it was really as much bodily as mental depression that was making big bright tears run down her cheeks—cheeks by no means as rosy as they had been. But she heard Jem's step on the stairs, and, drying her eyes hastily, was found busy at her work, ready to jump up and welcome him brightly.

"O Dolly, only think—I've got work for you!"

"Have you? O you nice Jem! What is it? Teaching little girls, I hope."

"Much better—*much*. Work that you can do here, in your own home; that I can bring to you and take back for you, so that you need never go out without me. And he says you'll make eight shillings a week, or ten."

Dolly, who had brightened up wonderfully, looked rather dolorous on hearing this; but she turned her face a little aside, and Jem was too proud of his plan to perceive her disappointment.

"Tell me what the work is," she said.

"Well, you know how well you did the engrossing when I was learning it. Now Mr. Gregson gives out a great deal of copying—*all* the capital letters. And he'll supply you with as much as you can do; and, with the help of doing the capitals, I'm sure you'll earn ten shillings a week, that's twenty-six pounds a year. Think of that, Dolly!"

Dolly had got over her first chill, and seized the papers with delight.

"Think of all that to lay by for Mamma!" she cried. "I shall work at this while you are away, and make your shirts in the evening while you read to me. Dear Jem, it was a good thought, and you 've made me so happy."

So Jem was quite satisfied, and greatly rejoiced that he had been able to gratify Dolly without letting her go about unprotected, of which he had the most unreasonable horror; for Dolly was quite right in thinking that no one would molest her. In nine cases out of ten it is a girl's own fault if she meets with impertinence. But you might have talked for ever to James without convincing him that his precious little sister might go about in perfect safety.

All went well during the summer. They took long walks every fine evening, often visiting the "diamond lane" and the deserted lodge. Moreover, Agatha Barlow had become very fond of Dolly, and often called for her during her early drive, took her home, and kept her until James came for her in the evening. These days were very pleasant to Dolly, who began to love her new friend very heartily. But winter was drawing near. Agatha and her mother were sent to the south of France again, and the evenings were too dark and cold for walking. The only exercise Dolly got now was when she went out to make her household purchases, or when she sometimes went a little way to meet Jem on his way home at four o'clock. She worked away at her law-copying, scolded herself dreadfully for feeling ill and inclined to cry, and kept up so well before James that he had

no idea that she was not as happy as she made him. She was earning ten shillings a week now, and they were really beginning to lay by. Not a line had they received from their family, and this added to Dolly's depression. The brilliant colour left her cheeks, and her pretty dark eyes looked weary and wistful. Jem remarked that she was pale, but she assured him she was not ill, and would be "all right" when summer came again. But it was a hard winter to poor little Dolly. Jem, who had never been so happy in his life, and before whom she was always cheerful, had no idea of the bitter tears she wept sometimes when alone.

In February a letter came from Fitz—a long, kind letter, in which he told them that he and Harcourt were now partners with Mr. Murray (their father's friend) in a fine business; that he had been, fortunately, anxious to undertake a contract for which he required a little ready money, and that they, having the money, had made a bargain with him. They were making money fast, and living like princes. The girls were very happy, in the best society the place afforded, and much admired. Mr. Dobbs had not yet ventured to join them, but they hoped he soon would, as Mamma fretted about him. They had, of course, changed their name, and now called themselves Murray, passing for relatives of the head of the firm. Mrs. Dobbs wanted them to come out at once. James should have a clerkship, and the run of the house, of course. They ought to come at once. The letter ended with many expressions of affection from Fitz himself, and a promise to send them their passage money if they could not manage it themselves.

This invitation was no temptation to James. He was very happy, and had no wish to leave his present employment. But it was a sore temptation to Dolly. The sameness, dullness, and dreariness of her present life made the idea of any change welcome; besides, she was very fond of her mother and Fitz.

"Jem, it is a very kind letter. What do you think of what he says about our going out to them?"

"How can you ask?" said James, opening his eyes. "Things have not changed since they went. The money which bought that partnership was not theirs —in *my* mind; and indeed it must be a queer business in which such a sum could be of much consequence. They 'll just go smash."

"Might not Mr. Murray have done it for Papa's sake?"

"Well, he *might*; but it is a chance. Now what we have is certain, and will increase every year. And I could not touch that money, nor take any good from it. I should feel like a thief."

"I suppose so," said Dolly slowly. He looked at her, and saw that there were tears in her eyes.

"Why, Dolly," he cried, turning quite pale, "you —you don't *want* to go. O Dolly!"

Dolly burst into tears. Jem was distracted. This was a turn of affairs for which he was not prepared. Dolly could not check her tears, and he was in a very sad state of mind before she could speak. He saw himself (mentally) forced either to part from Dolly or go with her to San Francisco!

"Oh, I should like to see Mamma," sobbed Dolly. Then, "No, Jem, don't pity me; that is not quite the truth. It is not only for that—but it would be

like our old home—and I'm—O Jem! I am ashamed of myself."

Jem took the sobbing little thing in his arms and soothed her tenderly.

"You need not be ashamed a bit, darling. Even I, a great strong fellow, used to think at first that I must give up and go home, it was so lonely, and the life so hard. And though you and I have never felt actual hardship, it is worse for you, poor little kitten, than that was for me. I knew that, brave and cheery as you always are."

"O Jem, don't praise me. I'm a hypocrite! Oh, it *is* hard; sometimes I feel as if—as if I could not—bear it. Don't think me wicked, but indeed I know I am wicked to feel so."

"My little Dolly! And I never saw that you were unhappy."

"I'm not unhappy. You must not say that. It is only—the long, long days—with no change in them."

Jem put her down into a chair, and then went to the window and stood staring out in silence while she dried her eyes, and wished she had not allowed her feelings to get the better of her before him.

"Dolly, I love you very much, you're sure of that, ain't you?"

"Yes, Jem, I am indeed."

"Well, dear, if you really feel that you must go, I'll go too. I hope Mr. Barlow may be able to give me a recommendation, and that I shall get work there. I won't join the rest, nor profit by that money in any way. But I'll take you out, and stay there to watch over you; you'll want me, sooner or later. But

before you make up your mind, think it well over, dear. The dishonesty, and the risk, and the fact that when another crash comes our hope of helping and supporting Mamma will be quite gone. Out there, not joining the others, I shan't do much, I fear, and you will be just one of them. You must think it all over, and then decide."

Dolly was about to speak, but he stopped her with a kiss.

"No, no, not to-night. Take time, any time you like, and then tell me."

Dolly remained silent, for she felt that if she spoke she would cry again. So the matter ended there for the present.

Next evening, having both thought and prayed over the question, Dolly felt equal to speaking of it calmly.

"Jem, I have obeyed you, and thought until my forehead was all wrinkled and my head fizzed. And you are to forget everything I said, and how I cried and made a fool of myself, and bothered my good old Jem. I see that you are right, and I'll never forget that you'd have gone for my sake. I won't go. We'll stay and work honestly, and make a home for poor Mamma; she 'll want it yet."

"And are you *sure* you are not unhappy, Dolly?"

"Jem, I do feel dull often, but I made too much of it last night. But when summer comes, and Agatha, I shall be all right, believe me."

So Fitz had an affectionate answer, but his invitation was declined; and Dolly kept up a bright face before Jem, and he nearly forgot, after a time, how she had confessed her sins that evening. But it had been a great battle, though the victory was with Dolly.

CHAPTER XIV.

AGATHA TO THE RESCUE.

QUIETLY, if somewhat drearily, passed the next four months. The weather was cold and wet, and Dolly had a bad cold, and was forced to trust all her shopping to Mrs. Reid for several weeks. She worked away with pen and needle, but she sometimes wondered vaguely how she was to live if this state of things was to last. The fact was, the change was too sudden and too complete, and her health and nerves had suffered, and were in danger of giving way altogether. However, fine weather came at last, Dolly's cold got well, and Agatha Barlow came home.

"O Jem! I've had a note from Agatha. And I'm to go early to-morrow and spend the whole day."

"I'll call for you in the evening, you know. I'm so glad she's come home, Dolly."

So Dolly set out in the morning, feeling as if she could fly, she was so happy; but long before she reached Earlston Villa she felt as if she could not drag herself along, she was so weary. Agatha met her in the hall, and instead of greeting her, exclaimed—

"Why, Dolly, what have you been doing with yourself?"

"I am tired, that's all. O Agatha, I'm so glad to see you."

Agatha kissed her, and took her to the drawing-room.

"Mamma," she said, "here is Dolly. At least she says she 's Dolly, but I think she 's only Dolly's ghost."

"Indeed, my child, you 've lost your fine colour. Have you been ill?"

"Only a cold, and it is quite gone now. I am very tired, though. I really think the way here has grown longer since last year; then I thought it quite short."

"We 'll have luncheon at once. Ring, Agatha. And how have you and your brother been getting on, my dear?"

"Very well indeed, Mrs. Barlow. Mr. Gregson says James is doing very well. And only think, Agatha, I am earning ten shillings a week by law copying."

"Is it not tiresome work, though?"

"I like the big capitals, and it is a change from needlework."

"But to earn ten shillings a week how long do you work each day, Dolly?"

"About six hours. You see I can do this at home, and Jem cannot bear the idea of my going out alone. Only for that I should have liked teaching better."

"He is very careful of you; but you *do* get a walk often, I hope?"

"It gets dark so soon in winter; and when the days lengthened I had this cold."

They had luncheon then, rather early, on Dolly's account. After luncheon Agatha took her up to her own room, determined to find out what had so changed her little friend. Very soon she drew forth a confession of her "wicked discontent," and how she had actually wanted to go to San Francisco, and had made Jem quite unhappy.

"But now that you are at home, and that we shall have our long walks again, I shall do very well."

"But the winter will come again," said Agatha.

"I won't think about it, though, with all the summer before me."

"Why, you 're a philosopher, Dolly," said Agatha, laughing.

"You would not say that if you saw me sometimes. I don't know what ails me, but I am always crying; when I least expect it I begin. I have to put away my writing sometimes, because the tears *will* run down my nose."

And Dolly laughed a little nervous giggle, and then burst into tears.

"Now, see what—a fool—I am," she sobbed out.

"Don't try to speak, my dear. O Dolly, you are very far from well; that 's the truth of it."

Dolly was soon herself again, and only anxious that "Jem should not be told."

"For you see, Agatha, I *must* earn money, for if I don't we shall never save a penny. And we both feel that we shall certainly have to get Mamma home and support her, sooner or later. And I might not like teaching any better, particularly if people were not kind and nice."

"I will not tell him, dear. I think I 'll order the

pony carriage and take you out; a drive will do you good. Or shall we stay quietly here?"

"A drive would be lovely; I do long for fresh air so much."

So they went out, and Dolly's tongue regained its merriment and her cheek its bloom as they drove along. Presently Dolly found herself passing by the old lodge of Warrendale Park.

"Why, I had no idea that your house was so near this," she exclaimed.

"Yes, by that new road we are quite close. You know the old earl built the new lodge at the other side of the park that he might forget how near the town was coming."

"But I thought your house—all those houses—belonged to him?"

"So they do. He wanted money, and built them for letting, but still he did not like them so near. Then the factory smoke began to kill the trees, and so they deserted the poor old place altogether."

"Those trees don't look dead, do they? The fresh young green is lovely."

"Those are beech and plane trees; the smoke does not hurt them. If you saw the park you would be quite sad. Fine old oaks standing up in groups, six or seven together, all black and dead."

"I should like to see that; they must look very weird. How I used to long last summer to walk up that lovely dark gloom under the trees!"

"Shall I get leave for you to walk there? You know my father manages everything here now."

"O Agatha! it will be such a treat. Jem wants to go quite as much as I do. I wish the earl lived

here still, and that he wanted a lodge-keeper and would give me the situation. Opening the gate for visitors would be great fun, unless they were perverse enough to come on wet days. And Jem and I would live in that *darling* lodge, and I wouldn't copy all those stupid papers, because I should pay the rent by opening the gate, don't you see? And oh, how I should like to work in that *poor* garden, and mend the trelliswork, and — do lots of things. Do you think, Agatha, that your father would recommend me for the place?"

"You would make a most picturesque gate-opener, no doubt; but how would Jem like the long walk to his office? And would it not be *infra dig.* for the future man of business to live in Lord Warrendale's lodge?"

"*Infra dig.*," quoth Dolly, merrily, "is Latin, I take it, for ungenteel, and Jem and I vowed long ago never to be genteel. Ah! poor, poor Mamma!"

And little Dolly suddenly became silent and thoughtful. I suppose Agatha became thoughtful too, for she was as silent as her friend. It was more than half an hour before either of them spoke again, and then Agatha said abruptly—

"I am sure it could be managed."

"What can be managed?" said Dolly.

"I did not mean to speak, dear. Dolly, what rent do you pay?"

"Eight shillings a week. That's sixpence a day for two of our rooms and a shilling a week for the third. You don't think it extravagant?"

"O dear, no. John, we must turn now, or we shall be late for dinner."

So the sober pony was turned round, and trotted off with renewed vigour towards home and dinner, his own dinner being more in his thoughts, I fear, than any fear that the girls might be late for theirs. They were in good time, however, and that was lucky, for Mr. Barlow had brought home Mr. Handcock and another gentleman to dine with him. And when Dolly came into the drawing-room, having beautified herself for the occasion with divers bows of pink ribbon furnished by Agatha, behold, the second gentleman was her well-beloved Jem! This was very delightful, and the whole evening was pleasant.

"I think I ought to feel freshened up for a good many days' work now," cried Dolly, as she put her flowers in water that night.

Mr. Handcock did not leave Mr. Barlow's house with the Dobbses. He and Agatha sat in the window and had a long talk; and presently Mr. and Mrs. Barlow joined them.

"What a nice little girl that is," remarked Mr. Barlow. "There 's something so bright and fresh about her."

"And I like the brother too," said his wife. "He is plain and unpretending, but he has plenty of good sense, and he 's very modest, which is more than one can say for most of the young men of the present day."

"That 's meant at me, Agatha," said Mr. Handcock. "I wish your mother would not be so personal."

"Papa," said Agatha, cruelly disregarding this plaint, "you have no idea how ill Dolly looked this morning; did she not, Mamma?"

"Indeed she did. I was startled at first, but she looked better after that drive with you."

"I'm not surprised that the child should look ill," Agatha went on. "She told me—you must not think, though, that she was complaining, for her only complaint is that she is afraid she must be very wicked—but it seems they are very anxious to save money, and think that their mother will some day be dependent on them. And Dolly has learned to engross, and Mr. Gregson gives her regular employment. She earns ten shillings a week."

"Well done, little Dolly! I knew there was a new hand at work; very good work she turns out too!"

"But, dear Papa, think of that child (for she is little more) working at such dull drudgery for six hours a day, all alone, scarcely getting any fresh air, for until quite lately it was too dark for them to walk in the evening! If you had only heard her confess with tears in her eyes that she is very wicked and discontented sometimes, but I must not tell Jem, because it can't be helped, and he would be miserable."

And Agatha repeated all Dolly's disclosures, and showed what a gallant fight the lonely girl was making against her own weakness.

"Upon my word she *is* a good little pet. I must have a talk with Dobbs and open his eyes to it."

"What good would that do, Papa? Now I know what *really* would do good, and Dolly would be as happy as the day is long."

"What's your plan, Agatha?" said Mr. Handcock. "Can I help?"

"You know the old lodge at the gate of the green avenue; we passed it to-day, and Dolly was prattling

away about the avenue, and I promised to get leave for her to walk there if she likes."

"Yes, certainly; I'll give her a key of the side gate."

"My dear Papa, I want you to do a great deal more than that. She was joking about getting the earl to make her the gate-opener, that she might live in the lodge, and it struck me that it is a pity to have that nice cottage empty when it would make Dolly so happy to live in it. The child is used to living in her garden a good deal, and you might let them have the lodge, Papa, and then she need not work so hard."

"Put my clerk rent free into the earl's house!" said Mr. Barlow, raising his eyebrows.

"Now, Papa, did you not say some time ago that you must have some one in that lodge, to keep out the old women who steal the wood?"

"You 'd arm Dolly with a life-preserver, I suppose, and bid her not spare the old women?"

"Her mere presence would warn the sinners off the premises; and Dolly would get back her colour and her strength, and be more like herself."

"Well, Agatha, I'll give you the keys, and you may drive there to-morrow and see if the house is in very bad repair; look about, in fact, for I never was in the cottage, and it may not be a place they could live in."

"O Papa, how delightful! Frank, you must come too, for the locks may be stiff. Come to luncheon to-morrow, and Mamma and I will go there with you afterwards."

So the next day this exploring expedition started,

and drove to the gate through which Jem had peeped on that memorable day when he found the diamonds.

Everything had run wild in the garden, and Mr. Handcock had to take his knife and clear a passage through it for the two ladies; but the house proved to be in better repair than they expected from the outside. It wanted papering and painting, and the windows wanted new glass, but the roof was good and the floors sound. There was a kitchen and a little back kitchen on the ground floor, with a room on each side. Upstairs there were three rooms, and there was a small yard at the back, and a large porch in front, with a stone seat all round it.

The rooms were small, but pretty, with diamond-paned windows, and walls panelled for about three feet from the ground.

"I declare, Mamma, my plan will do beautifully. A very little will make this habitable, and I am much mistaken if Dolly does not soon make it pretty. That will be better work for her than copying law papers."

They drove home, and at dinner Agatha told her father the result of her investigations.

"All right," said he, "a few pounds will put it in fair order. I will have what is necessary done at once. But there is one thing, Agatha, which you have forgotten."

"What is that, Papa?"

"Furniture, my dear. I don't suppose they have a three-legged stool between them; and furnishing is a serious business."

"Very, Papa; as serious as you are trying to look. How do you mean to manage it?"

"You have no respect for my grey hairs, Agatha."

"O yes, Papa—and for your plan about the furniture too."

"Well, I can advance Dobbs the money, and let him pay by degrees. I'll send in the workmen to-morrow."

The workmen were sent in, and Agatha drove to the lodge every day to watch their progress, and to suggest one or two improvements, such as a set of shelves in a convenient corner, and a tiny dwelling for fowl in the yard. In about three weeks the house was ready.

Dolly had paid her friends two or three visits during this interval, and they had remarked with anxiety that the increasing heat was evidently increasing her weakness. She could not walk both to and from Earlstown Villa, as she had so often done last year, and she really looked very ill. Even James saw this now, and was most unhappy about it. Little knowing what relief was coming, he made up his mind that something must be done.

"Dolly, will you come out this evening? Do, my dear, it will make you sleep."

The day had been very hot, and Dolly looked white and weary.

"I'll come, Jem, but we won't go far, I'm so tired."

She was always tired, poor child. They walked about for a time, and then she said she could do no more; and Jem could have cried to see how wearily she climbed up the stairs, which had so often rung to the music of her pattering feet as she flew up them, when she first came there. She sat down the moment they reached their room, and sighed heavily

"O Dolly, Dolly! this won't do. My darling, I've been blind and stupid, but now I must see what can be done."

"But, dear Jem, it is only the heat."

"A little while ago it was only the cold; but the truth is the air here doesn't agree with you, nor the life you lead. I ought to have seen it before. Dolly, I've been very selfish."

"Nonsense, Jem."

"But I have. I see it now. I would not let you seek for work which would have given you variety and air, and I wouldn't look for lodgings in an open part of the town, because I felt sure you were safe with Mrs. Reid; and I won't go on so any more."

"But what can we do, dear? I couldn't bear to leave Mrs. Reid now, she's so kind."

"I think we must though. I'll try for lodgings a little way out along the road. And, Dolly, you must not copy any more. You must do nothing now but nurse yourself, and when you are quite well we'll see about little girls to teach; you used to fancy that."

"But I couldn't do it now, Jem," said Dolly tearfully. "Don't ask me to leave off working—it would break my heart. We *must* save, you know, for Mamma."

"You are my first care, dear, and I think the writing disagrees with you."

"But I *will* write," Dolly said, peevishly, "and no one shall stop me. Of course if you choose to leave these lodgings I can't help it, but I *will* work, and I *will* copy."

And she got up and rushed off to her own room,

leaving poor Jem open-mouthed with astonishment. Presently he felt a little hand on his shoulder, and there was Dolly, crying like a child.

"O Jem, forgive me! I didn't mean a word of it, dear—I'm only cross and silly. I will do whatever you like, Jem. Only I hope I 'm not going to be sickly, and a burden."

"My darling, as if you could be a burden! Don't cry, Dolly. We 'll find nice airy rooms, and—children to teach by-and-by; and you know some day my salary will be raised, and we shall do very well."

But Dolly was not to be comforted.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. BARLOW'S GATE-KEEPER.

"MR. GREGSON, I want to ask for a holiday, and I don't wish to inconvenience you. Would to-morrow suit you? I want to look for airier lodgings for my sister."

"Is she ill?"

"Not exactly ill, but she will soon be if I don't mind."

"To-morrow will suit me very well. Where I lodge on the —— road, there is a fine wholesome air, and it is not expensive."

"Thank you, sir," said Jem, laying down his pen and going to the door of Mr. Barlow's room, at which he knocked.

"Eh, Dobbs, is that you? What is it?"

"If you would allow me to take a holiday to-morrow, sir, I have some business of my own to do."

"Yes, very good. How 's your sister?"

"Not at all well, sir. I 'm afraid I 've been very stupid—that 's nothing new, but I did think I could take care of Dolly."

"And I am sure you 've done your best; no man can do more, you know."

"Other men's bests would be better than mine," said Jem, with a sigh. "There, I've kept her in that narrow crowded street, never remembering what a change it was for her; and let her work too hard too, until the poor little thing is hardly able to walk."

"You must not blame yourself too much, Jem," said Mr. Barlow, kindly, quite touched by the poor fellow's downcast looks. "It was only want of experience, not want of kindness: and there is nothing serious the matter, nothing that fresh air and a little amusement won't set to rights."

"Do you think so, sir?"

"I feel sure of it. She is a healthy girl, and where there is good health to begin with, a little ailment like this soon passes away." And Mr. Barlow sighed.

"I'm going to try for lodgings a little way out of town; if there's a strip of garden where they'd let her work, it would do her more good than anything. I must stop her law-copying too, though it will nearly break her heart."

"Garden—is she fond of gardening?"

"O yes, sir; she had a garden at home, and spent half her time working in it."

"Lodgings are dear out of town, and if you want a garden—— By the way, Jem," continued Mr. Barlow, turning away so as to hide a smile. "I have an idea. I wonder would you like it? I've been painting and repairing the lodge—the old lodge, you know, of Warrendale Park. It's a quiet place, pure air, but rather lonely, of course. I want to put some one in who would look after things there for me, keep the keys, and see to the house being opened and aired

regularly. Do you think you and your sister would dislike it? You would be rent free, you know, but of course I would give you both something to do; and may be you would not like it," went on the wily Mr. Barlow, who had the greatest possible dislike to overwhelming people with benefits.

"The lodge, sir! the lodge on the road, near where I found the diamonds?"

"Yes, the very place."

"Why, sir," cried Jem, his face brightening up most marvellously, "if you 'll believe me, Dolly has the greatest fancy for that lodge. How often she has said that her fingers longed to be at the garden and the trelliswork. And as to trouble, nothing would be a trouble; I have plenty of time in the evening. Why, Dolly would be quite cured at the very idea of it."

"Well, I am glad you are pleased. I hardly liked to mention it, because some people have such strange notions of——"

"Gentility," interrupted James, as Mr. Barlow paused for a word. "Mr. Barlow, whatever Dolly and I may be, we 'll *never* be genteel."

Mr. Barlow laughed at the solemn way he spoke. He little knew what gentility meant to Jem!

"Then," said he, "that matter is settled. But what will you do about furniture?"

"We have saved a little money, not enough though. But I 'll sell my watch."

"No, no, we 'll settle it thus. I will advance you what you require, and you can pay me a certain sum weekly; arrange that with your sister."

"You are very, very kind, Mr. Barlow."

"I have got a very, very good clerk, sir, and he has a very, very good little sister, and I must make them comfortable. Well, take a holiday to-morrow and go out to inspect the lodge. My daughter shall call for Dolly, and drive her out."

Mr. Barlow resumed his writing, and James went back to his big account book with head and heart so full that he had to wait a few minutes before he could compose himself to his work.

Mr. Barlow went home to luncheon, and when Agatha came down he said to her—

"My dear, I 'm afraid you 'll be angry with me, for I 've spoken about the lodge to young Dobbs. You see he came to ask me for a holiday that he might look out for airier lodgings, and I was chatting with him, and so, when the opportunity was so good, I just said I meant to put some one into the lodge, who should keep the keys, look after the house, &c., and would he care to undertake it; and he jumped at it."

"O Papa! you designing old man. And did you then go on to say that you had some second-hand furniture which you would be obliged to him to take off your hands for a small sum?"

"No Miss, I said nothing of the sort!"

"And now you are sorry you did not think of it! Never mind, Papa, I forgive you; indeed I am glad it has happened thus; I am sure it is best."

"It was indeed, my dear. He must have suspected that it was done on purpose for them if I had not mentioned it then; now it is a mere matter of business, and I shall really make him do all the overseeing out there, so that it will save me a good deal of trouble."

"Indeed, Papa, I'm not sure that you have not made too hard a bargain with poor Jem, after all! What a hard, grinding man you are! Well, at all events, I shall see Dolly's face when she goes into her new kingdom to-morrow."

"Yes, go early and take her out there, dear. She could not walk so far."

How long the way home seemed to James that evening, though certainly not because he made much delay! For he walked at such a pace that several people wondered whether he was escaping from the police or going for a doctor. Only once did he stop, and that was before the window of a shop where second-hand furniture was sold. There his eye was caught by a large and handsome bookshelf and writing table combined, which he thought "would hold all our books and Dolly's papers so comfortably," and no doubt there would have been room enough. Then he sped on again and soon reached Mrs. Reid's house. No sweet little face was to be seen peeping through the banisters of the kitchen stairs; poor Dolly had quite given up running about more than was necessary. Jem went up, but Dolly was not in the sitting-room, although her writing still lay on the table, which was generally prepared for dinner before he came home. He went to the door of her own room and knocked: getting no answer, he went in, feeling rather nervous. But poor little Dolly was only asleep; the night before had been unusually hot, and she had hardly slept at all. She had copied away as long as she could, and had then fancied that a little needlework would be a pleasant change. So she had gone to her room to take the trimming off her summer

hat, and put it on again, revised and improved; and in the middle of this most interesting occupation (for that it was interesting to Dolly I am not ashamed to confess) she had fallen fast asleep, and her head had dropped gently upon the bed beside which she was sitting, while her straw hat, ribbons, flowers, and all, lay in a heap at her feet. The sound of the creaking door disturbed her, and she opened her eyes and stared blankly at Jem.

"Why, Dolly, are you feeling worse, my darling?"

"Worse, what 's worse? Dear me, Jem, is that you? Are you not very early?"

"A few minutes earlier than usual because I walked fast. Were you ill, dear?"

"No, only sleepy. I must have had a fine long nap, for I came here at two o'clock, and see how little I had done to my hat."

"And I'm sure you did not eat your biscuits, though you promised me, Dolly."

"There they are indeed; but how could I eat when I was asleep? Never mind, I'll eat all the better dinner. And the cloth is not laid. O dear! I've been very lazy."

She gathered up her work and laid it on the bed, and Jem, watching the sleepy flush fade from her face, thought that he would not tell his news until she had had some dinner to strengthen her a little.

"Get dinner, Dolly, for I have some news for you —good news—that will please you, dear. And I shan't tell it until after dinner."

It saddened him to see how she tried to put on her old bright manner, and to appear in a hurry to get dinner, and angry with him for not telling her the

news at once; and what a languid little performance it was with all her pains!

Dinner was over, and Dolly had apparently forgotten all about the news, for she began arranging the room, and asked no questions.

"Well, Dolly, don't you want to hear the news I spoke of?"

"O yes, I had forgotten. What is it, Jem? Stay, I've guessed it!"

"Tell me your guess, and I'll give you six, Dolly, and bet you a cake for tea that you don't guess right."

"Why, what *can* it be?" she said, looking quite eager at last. "Is your salary raised?"

"No. That's one guess."

"Then, O Jem, is it that the wedding is to be soon—Agatha and Mr. Handcock?"

"No, and that's two."

"Well, let me think. I suppose it is *not* that I am to spend to-morrow with Agatha. No, for you would have told me that at once."

"Dolly, for shame, you are trying to cheat. I'll count that as three, and you're wrong again. Half the guesses gone. No cake for tea to-night."

"You've heard of cheap lodgings?"

Jem pondered for a moment. Could he fairly say no? Of course he could; the lodge was not lodgings, and to live rent free is not to live in cheap lodgings. So he said "No; but that's the best shot you've made."

"Then it is something about lodgings, Jem. O tell me quick. I won't guess any more."

The colour deepened on her cheek, her eyes were

like Dolly's eyes again in her excitement, and Jem began to work his slow brain and loving heart for means to lengthen out her pleasure.

"It *is* about lodgings, and yet it isn't," he said.

Dolly screamed, just a little cry of wonder and fuss, and exclaimed, "You 've heard of a wee, wee house, then, such a tiny one that we can have it all to ourselves and make it nice and pretty."

"Dolly, I declare you 're a witch! Go on guessing."

"But, O Jem, I shall be so disappointed if you are only making fun of me."

"As if that 's likely! And you won't be disappointed, guess as you will. What do you wish for most? Now think, Dolly."

"Ah!" she said; "but I wish for impossible things sometimes. It is better neither to think nor to talk of them."

"Just this once to please me. Say what you really wish now. I 'm not afraid."

"My dear Jem, has some fairy been giving you three wishes?"

"Yes, that 's just it," exclaimed Jem, delightedly, "and I want you to wish them. So now, Dolly, fire away."

"A garden," gasped Dolly.

"You shall have it, my dear," Jem answered, quietly. This so amazed her that she could only stare in silence.

"Go on, Dolly. Anything else?"

"Jem, I am afraid you 've gone silly—I am indeed."

"I am as wise as usual. Your second wish, please; don't keep the fairy waiting."

"Fresh air and quiet."

"Is that one wish or two? The fairy may not like to be cheated."

"I think it is only one; you can't have fresh air in a noisy place."

"Very well. Now for the third, please."

But Dolly had turned quite pale, and could only cry out, "O tell me all, Jem, I feel as if my head was turning into a humming-top!"

Jem took her up and put her on his knee, saying, "You little goosey! there now, be quiet and I'll tell you. You 'll hardly believe me, yet I assure you it is all true, both what I have said, and what I am going to say. I went to Mr. Barlow to-day to ask for a holiday, that I might look out for lodgings, and he was talking to me about it, when he remembered this, and asked me if I should like it. He wants some one to live in the old lodge, that you admire so much—Warrendale Park, you know—and to keep the keys and oversee everything. And he offered it to me, rent free, Dolly; and there 's a garden, and he 's had it all painted and repaired. Why, Dolly, I thought you'd be pleased." For Dolly was crying as if her heart would break.

"Oh, so I am, only I 'm silly. Oh, what a foolish, ungrateful little *pig* I 've been," with a vicious emphasis on the word pig; "I don't deserve this a bit, so discontented, so peevish, so——" Her self-accusation ended in a great sob.

"Nothing of the sort, dear! you 've only been very poorly, and that made you feel bad. You 'll soon be well again now. We shall have no rent to pay, so that anything you earn will be a clear gain, you

know; so you need not work hard, only for, say, three hours a day. And you 'll have to keep the garden in order, and the house too. Plenty of running about and fresh air."

"It is only *too* good. And a nice pretty walk for you every day instead of these weary streets."

"Miss Barlow will call for you to-morrow to take you out to see what furniture we shall want. Mr. Barlow is to advance me the money to buy it."

"I was just wondering how we could manage. We will get only just enough, Jem, and add anything we want by degrees."

They sat there talking over their new prospects until it was quite late; and that night, every time that the heat and the street noises awoke Dolly, she murmured "The Lodge," and went to sleep again with a smile upon her face.

Next morning Mrs. Reid had to be told the news, and she was unselfishly delighted to hear it, for Dolly's sake. She at once offered to go with them and point out places where second-hand furniture could be obtained. Dolly thanked her, but when she was gone, said to Jem, "No second-hand finery for me. Don't let us get anything second-hand, Jem. They may be cheap, but they are certainly nasty! all the furniture in this house was 'picked up,' as she calls it, second-hand. And just look at it, dirty and stuffy, not fitting into the corners nicely, and each article looking as if it wouldn't bow to the rest. Let us get *very* plain things, and as little as we can, but new and clean and fresh."

"I think you are right, Dolly. I leave all that to you; only I saw such a nice kind of table and book-

shelf and drawers, all in one, yesterday. You might just look at it."

"We 'll measure the rooms first," said Dolly. "Run out, Jem, and buy me a two-foot rule."

I may just state here that when the measurements were made it was found that the little drawing-room, or parlour, at the lodge, was only nine feet high, whereas the article on which Jem had fixed his affections was nine and a half in height, and large in proportion. It would have filled the room had it ever been got in, but indeed it must have shared the fate of the Vicar of Wakefield's too ambitious family picture.

Agatha and her mother came for Dolly at about ten o'clock, and with them came Mr. Handcock, who carried James off in a cab, so that they all arrived at about the same time. If Dolly had admired the lodge when in its old state of disrepair, how did she admire it now, when the trelliswork was neatly mended; when the windows shone till every little diamond pane twinkled like a star; when the path up to the door was clear, and the shape of the flower-beds could at least be guessed at; and when, above all, kind Mr. Barlow stood in the door and said, "Ah! this is the new gate-keeper! Rather young for the place, but I hope you 'll be sober and civil." That *was* a joke, if you like. Then the bright, cheery little rooms, the charming kitchen range, the delicious coal-hole (I am giving you Dolly's adjectives), the darling little parlour, the lovely back yard with a *dear* darling hen-house, and the most perfect pigeon-house ever seen nailed up to the wall. And the shelves of Agatha's contriving. Oh, it was

all so nice that Dolly didn't think furniture would improve it. However, when Mr. and Mrs. Barlow had left them, taking away Agatha, as they were afraid she would catch cold, and Mr. Handcock and Jem began to make a list of necessary things, Dolly ceased to exclaim, produced her two-foot rule, and proved herself the most clear-headed and practical of the three.

The rooms were measured, and the sizes written down in Jem's note-book. The room on the right side of the kitchen was to be the parlour; the other Jem advised Dolly to take for her own, but she looked mysterious, and said, No; the room over it was very nice, and Jem should have the one over the parlour. A list was made, and Mr. Handcock remarked that no furniture was appropriated to the second room downstairs; but he heard Dolly whisper to her brother, "We 'll do that by degrees for poor Mamma." Then they sat down in the porch to rest.

"The only thing I don't like," said Jem presently, "is, that Dolly will be alone here for so many hours every day. I didn't think of it till I saw the place. Tramps might frighten her."

"What! with that grand gate between us, Jem? I can keep it locked while you are away."

"Still, Miss Dolly, I agree with Jem. It is too lonely for you to be quite alone; you 'll have to get a servant."

"O Mr. Handcock, no! We should have to take a girl like the one Mrs. Reid had during the winter; and oh, she was so dirty! I would much rather not have her."

"But you need not have *her*," said James.

"We could only afford such another though, and I should hate her dreadfully."

"Well, but I don't like you to be alone, Dolly. If we could find some nice clean girl—cheap, you know," and Jem frowned in the intensity of his new cares as the master of a house.

"Not a girl," said Mr. Handcock, "but an old woman; and I know the old woman, the very article for you, Miss Dolly—made on purpose, I do believe. She 's in the workhouse, and she hates it awfully. She cannot bear the idleness and the kind of talk that goes on. She was once well off, but her husband and sons were lost at sea, and she, after living as best she could for many years, had a fever, and had to go into the house. She is really a good, decent creature, and she 's always asking me to find a place for her."

After some resistance, Dolly promised to see old Mrs. Pyne, and to "think about it." Then they returned to town, and the next few hours were spent in shopping. Oh, what pleasant shopping! Dolly was very hard to please though. She knew what she wanted, and would take nothing else. Jem marvelled at the steadiness with which she refused to be talked into buying anything but just the article she described, and the perseverance with which she hunted for that article. Not a single bit of rosewood or gilding would she look at—nothing but cane and polished deal, or plain white paint; and yet she would buy no ugly, clumsy things. But at last, with much patience, she got all that she wanted. Four common cane chairs; two lounges of the same

material; a neat oval table; a second narrow table to stand against the wall; a small book-case to stand on this table; a fender and fire-irons, the plainest that could be found. No carpet, no curtains; white muslin blinds would do for the present. This was for the parlour. The bedrooms were provided for on the same scale of simplicity—a small iron bedstead, a table, chair, and chest of drawers for each.

"And really, Jem, that's all I can do to-day. I I should like to have chosen all we want while you can be with me, but I'm so tired that I must leave the kitchen and all the earthenware for to-morrow. You won't mind?"

"No, certainly not. Whatever you get I am sure I shall like it. Come home now, dear."

So Dolly went forth to her shopping again the next day, but this time alone; and I fear that Jem's absence made her extravagant, for she could not bring herself to buy the very cheap and clumsy cups and saucers which her conscience made her ask for at first. Those she chose were not dear, however, and she consoled herself by hoping they would last better. Having purchased a modest supply of crockery, and a few saucepans and other cooking utensils, she fondly believed that she had got everything necessary, and determined to begin housekeeping next day. The goods were all to be sent to the lodge, and Agatha drove Dolly out, bringing also a stout housemaid to help in arranging everything; and as excitement made Dolly equal to two housemaids, the furniture was soon in its place. No empress was ever prouder of her palace than was Dolly of her house and its contents.

"O Agatha! does it not look nice? I cannot bring myself to believe that I shall be living here and using all these clean pretty things, instead of the stuffy horrors we 've about us lately."

"I like everything you have got, Dolly; but you seem to me not to have got enough for comfort."

"Oh, it 's nice warm weather, and one wants but little. I will get things by degrees."

"Well, but you see I want to make you a present, and I was waiting to see what you want most. Now, I shall give you a carpet and curtains for this room and strips of carpet for the bedrooms. Then they will look far nicer."

"Indeed, Agatha—*indeed* we have all we want. Please, Agatha——"

"Please, Dolly, don't be cross; let me have my own way in this. Mamma wants to give you a present too, and I was to tell her what to get. And I see something—or, rather, I *don't* see something, Mistress Dolly, which I think you must have."

"What is that? You are all too kind to me; but indeed I think I have everything that is actually necessary."

"My dear, if you were on a desert island you *might* contrive to wash yourself and get dry somehow without a towel; and as you would have no furniture to dust, you would not want a duster; and you could certainly eat your dinner without a table-cloth, and sleep without sheets; but unless your desert island were warmer than this country, I think you would wish for blankets, Dolly."

Dolly started, reddened, and then laughed heartily.

"I never remembered all that. I just bought

mattresses and pillows. O Agatha, how Jem will laugh at me."

"Mamma's presents shall be sheets, table-cloths and towels," said Agatha.

Dolly bought blankets on her way home, and her memory having got a jog, even remembered quilts. Finally, all was ready. Jem had another holiday, that they might make the move comfortably. They were very busy, unpacking their clothes and books, when Mr. Handcock made his appearance in a cab, bringing with him old Mrs. Pyne. On the top of the cab was a large, low crate, from which issued the most extraordinary sounds. Dolly ran out to the door, and Mr. Handcock called in peremptory style, "Gate! gate there! You 're very slow—worst gate-opener I ever saw in my life."

"Please, sir, I 'm new to the place," cried Dolly, in great glee. "Don't go and complain of me. I'll do better next time. You 're welcome, Mrs. Pyne: come in; don't you like the kitchen? I think I like it as well as the parlour. Mr. Handcock, what *is* that noise?"

"Miss Dolly, Agatha wouldn't let me give you a carpet, though I had set my heart on it from the first, so I turned my attention to the live stock. Driver, lend a hand here. Jem, catch this, will you? Look —I 've brought you a cock and four hens—speckled Hamburghs—very fine layers, I 'm told. And a pair of white pigeons to live in that fine new dovecot. And —last, but not least—Miss Dolly, I 've brought you a friend and companion. You 'll never feel lonely now when Jem is away, nor want a welcome when you come home."

And from a large basket in the cab he produced a little grey Skye terrier, with such a pair of saucy eyes and such a dear little black snub nose, that Dolly went down on her knees and kissed it then and there, and only afterwards remembered that she had never said thank you. The cock and his four wives were shut up in the hen-house; the pigeons were fed and caressed, and begged to remain in their new abode, to secure which a bit of looking-glass was put in for them by Mr. Handcock's advice.

"They 'll stand swelling and cooing before that for hours—until they get used to the place, and know you. Then you had better take it out, or you 'll have other people's pigeons coming to you."

But Brisk, the terrier, was made one of the family without delay; and of one thing we may be pretty sure—in his own opinion he was not the least important member of it.

Jem and Dolly had always been in the habit of reading a portion of Scripture and a prayer (out of the Prayer-book) before they went to bed, and to-night they called Mrs. Pyne to join them. Jem was not fluent at any time, but to-night his heart was too full of gratitude for silence to be possible; so when the usual prayer was finished, and they had all repeated the Lord's prayer together, Jem laid his hand on Dolly's as she was about to rise, and having remained still for a moment, he looked up and said—

"Father! This is all Thy giving. Make us very grateful. Fill us with Thy Love."

It was not an eloquent thanksgiving, but it came from a full heart, and surely such words do not linger on their way to the Throne.

CHAPTER XVI.

A QUIET MIND.

IT would delay me too long—for I have a good deal to tell yet that must be told—were I to describe at length the first merry days at the lodge. How Dolly worked in the garden, planting and sowing. How Brisk had to be punished for digging up the roots which she had just put down. How the hens screamed in chorus when Brisk rushed out into the yard. How the said hens eat much food and laid no eggs. How at last they laid, among them, one very small egg, and broke it; Mrs. Pyne said, because they had no nests. How, nests being provided, the hens set them at nought, and laid eggs in select corners of the yard, in the coal-hole, under the pump—anywhere, in fact, save in the nests. How Agatha suggested that they should have a nest-egg—and how, nest-eggs being provided, the hens felt that their dignity had been properly consulted, and the family had fresh eggs in plenty. How the little garden gradually grew trim and fair and sweet, thanks to cuttings, plants, roots and seeds from Mr. Barlow's big garden. How Dolly sang over her cookery, her sketching, her gardening—over everything except her copying, which was still a solemn business, though

no longer a burden. How her cheeks bloomed again, and her eyes brightened, and how she found it hard to believe that she had ever felt weak and woe-begone, and disposed to cry for nothing. Finally, how proud and full of joy was Jem, and how little he realised that all this happiness was his work—the result of his simple, plodding, earnest well-doing.

They heard again from Fitz. All was going on well, he said, and Mirrie was going to be married to a "perfect gentleman," possessed of fabulous riches, and who gave her splendid presents. He ended by urging them to come out, but this was no longer a trial to Dolly.

So passed the happy summer, and autumn was nearly over, when one day the white pony stopped at the gate. Brisk ran out barking, and Dolly followed, opened the small gate, and admitted Agatha.

"I've come to spend the morning, Dolly, if you are not busy."

"O I'm never too busy for that!"

"Then, John, you may go home, and come back for me about three, please."

"That's lovely, Agatha. Come in that I may set things going about dinner, then Mrs. Pyne will see to it, and we can sit in the garden if you like?"

"Not to-day, dear. It is rather cold now for me to sit in the open air."

"Then we'll sit in the parlour. Does not my garden look beautiful, Agatha? even still, late as it is."

"It does, indeed—I think your geraniums are in better blossom than mine," Agatha answered, and as she spoke she sighed a little. Dolly hastened to make her arrangements, and then took her visitor into

the little parlour, which really looked quite pretty in its fresh, clean simplicity, aided by flowers and ferns in the window and on the tables. Agatha was placed in one of the lounges, and Dolly took out her needlework.

"I came to tell you something, Dolly."

"Oh," cried Dolly, looking up quickly, "is it *that*?"

"Is it what? What do you mean?"

"Never mind—I don't think it is that, now that I look at you. What is it, Agatha?"

"The doctors say I must spend this winter abroad, as I did last winter."

Dolly's face lengthened considerably.

"Oh, must you really? I thought you were so much better; Mr. Handcock thinks so, and Mrs. Barlow said so only a week ago!"

"I know they all think so. Did Frank say that to you?—poor Frank."

"He said it to Jem. And so you are, Agatha! you are much stronger, are you not?"

"They say I am. Even Dr. Hedley says that this is only a precaution. But—Dolly, don't tell any one that I said this; I do not think myself that I am better."

"O don't say that, dear Agatha; you must be better—if not, who would know it so well as your father and mother, and Mr. Handcock and the doctor?"

"Myself," she answered quietly. "But tell me, Dolly, what did you think just now I was going to tell you?"

"Something much nicer than what you *did* tell me, I assure you. How we shall miss you, Agatha. What shall I do without you?"

"You have plenty to do—and you must do something for me. Papa has become so fond of you, Dolly, that it has been quite a pleasure to him, walking out here of an evening to see how you and your garden get on. Try and coax him to come sometimes while we are away. He is so lonely at home without us."

"I will. Oh, he is so kind to me—I always feel quite delighted when I hear him call 'Gate!' I'll tell him that I shall fall into idle habits if he does not keep me in practice. Well—I shan't be so badly off as I was last winter, and yet I shall miss you more, because I know you so much better now, Agatha."

"I shall miss you very much, too. You 've brightened my summer more than you would believe. But you have not answered my question—and I mean to be answered."

"What question?"

"What did you think I was going to tell you?"

"I would rather not say, Agatha."

"Then I will tell you. It was—that I was going to be married."

"Yes, it was," Dolly answered, blushing.

"Dolly, I do so long to speak freely about that to some one—and you are my friend, you know. Will you listen, and tell no one what I say? It will be a relief to me to speak to you about it."

"Indeed I will tell no one. Is it to be when you come home in spring?"

"So they think—but indeed, dear, it will not be then, or ever."

"Agatha! what, not ever at all? you cannot mean that. And he——"

"He loves me, and I love him. We 've been engaged now for four years. Yet, Dolly, I shall never be his wife. I feel quite sure of that. I shall never be strong; never as well again, I think, as I have been this summer. And I will never bind him to an ailing wife."

"Yet—if he wishes it?"

"He must not wish it. He is a clergyman, his time and strength are not his own, you know, and he must not waste either of them in nursing his wife. He is not very strong himself, either."

"You will never have the heart to tell him this."

"I shall never need to tell him."

"Why? if he thinks it is—to be—next spring?"

"It will come by degrees of itself. Dolly, don't tell any one that I said this."

"I don't understand you, Agatha," Dolly said quickly. "Oh, I shall pray *so* hard that you may come home so well that even you will feel that you cannot say a word against it!"

"Ah, Dolly! I used to pray for that. Now I pray that 'not my will, but His' may be done. Let us walk up to the Hall, Dolly. It is so lovely under the beech trees at this time of the year."

In a few days Agatha and her mother were gone to the south of France; and Dolly missed them very much. Yet she did not feel lonely and wretched, for she was now in perfect health, happy and busy. Not that she forgot her mother, or any of them; but she showed her affection in a much better way than by fretting. Every penny that could be spared was either laid by to provide for "poor Mamma's" possible journey, or spent in furnishing the pretty room

at the other side of the kitchen. It was done by degrees, however—a sofa now, a carpet some other time—but it was a most pretty and luxurious little room, and always kept as ready as it could be made for its absent owner. This was done in silence; not even to Agatha did Dolly show her treasures, for she was afraid it would be thought silly. The winter passed without any event of importance, except that the junior clerk left Mr. Barlow's office, and Jem got his place, with a better salary.

It was now nearly summer again, and Agatha wrote to tell Dolly that she was coming home. "And you will see that I was right," she added. Alas, when they met, Dolly did see it. The change, though slight, was very perceptible. Mrs. Barlow, having been with her daughter all this time, did not seem aware of it, it had come so gradually. She was the only person who said a word about the long delayed marriage; something kind to Dolly, about Agatha having no sister, and no friend so dear as herself, so that she must be thinking what she would like to wear as bridesmaid. Dolly changed colour, though she contrived to answer, "O Mrs. Barlow, I shall leave the choice to you, and only do as I am desired."

"It will not be just yet, Mamma," said Agatha, "I have spoken to Frank." Mrs. Barlow asked no questions, but went on to talk of something else in a hurried, nervous way.

CHAPTER XVII.

"AND THIS IS JEM!"

THE summer passed slowly away. Little was thought of either at the lodge or at Earlstown Villa, but the gradual decay of Agatha's health. When autumn came she was evidently dying. Dolly spent all her mornings with her friend, nursing and cheering her; the evening was Mr. Handcock's time for being with her. But the end was very near now.

One day Dolly left Earlstown Villa at the usual time, and went home. Dinner was over, and she and Jem were just setting out for a walk when the old white pony once more stopped at the gate, and Mr. Barlow's servant called out to them, "I've come for Miss Dobbs; Missus sent me."

Dolly ran to the gate.

"John! is she worse?"

"Miss Dolly, jump in. She asked to see you again."

"I will follow you, Dolly, and wait about; you'll find me when you want me," whispered James, as he almost lifted the frightened girl into the little carriage.

It was ten o'clock before Jem's lonely watch was

over. He was just making up his mind to go up to the house and ask if Dolly was to stay all night, when he saw a little figure coming slowly down the broad walk. He opened the gate and went forward to meet her, for he knew, rather than saw, that it was Dolly. She crept up to him, and put out her hands like a child. She was not crying, but her face was white, and her eyes looked full of awe, a solemn kind of joy even.

"Jem, Agatha has gone home!"

"My poor little Dolly! I am glad you saw her again."

"I 'm glad I was there. O Jem, those two—to see them. We all stood round, and she said good-bye to each, and some little fond word, but when that was done she turned her face to him and put her hand in his—he was kneeling beside her. And she said nothing! not one word, but they looked, and looked, until she closed her eyes and sighed. And then he fell down on the floor."

"It will kill him. Is he better now?"

"Yes, and they are all very quiet. O I am glad—thankful, to have seen this. I was so afraid of it, and it was like a tired child falling asleep."

"Come home, my darling. I 'll get a cab, for you are shaking so that I don't think you can walk."

"No, dear, let me walk. The cool air will do me good; my head feels heavy."

So they set out to walk home. What might have been the end of the matter if they had gone in a cab I do not know.

They had left the road in which Earlstown Villa stood, and had to cross a street, beyond which cross-

"She's in a fit; run for a doctor."

Page 233.

ing the quiet road went on again; but the street was noisy and crowded, full of small shops, and bright with gaslight. Dolly, whose head was dizzy, clung to her brother's arm as they set out to cross this thoroughfare. A few steps down the street a crowd had collected on the footpath, and many voices were heard, some crying "She 's drunk, call the police!" others, "Not she, she 's in a fit; run for a doctor." A policeman hurried past the two Dobbses, and the crowd opened to let him see the object round which it was gathered. A woman lying on the pavement: some one had raised her head from the ground, and as there was a flaring gas lamp just over the spot, the poor white face was plainly to be seen. Dolly dropped Jem's arm, looked wildly in his face for a moment, and before the crowd could close in again after the policeman she had darted through and fallen on her knees beside the prostrate woman. Jem, who was very short-sighted, really thought for a moment that his sister had suddenly lost her senses, but he followed her without delay.

"Jem, it is Mamma! O Jem, it is poor Mamma; is she dead?"

James stooped, and looked incredulously at the shabby, dingy dress. "It *can't* be," he began; but then he saw the face. "It is!" he said breathlessly.

For a few seconds no one spoke or moved. Everyone was curious to know what had brought this pretty, well-dressed girl on the scene, and the brother and sister were too much agitated to speak. But Jem recovered himself, and standing up he said quietly to the policeman—

"This lady is my mother. I will take her home with me. She has just returned from America, and did not know where I live now. Get a cab as quickly as you can; I think she has only fainted."

A passing cab was quickly stopped.

"Get in, Dolly, and be ready to hold her," and with the policeman's help, Jem lifted his mother in, and put her into Dolly's arms. There was a minute's delay, as the policeman asked Jem's name and address, and then they were off. When they reached the lodge, Dolly whispered—

"She is recovering; I think she moved. Carry her at once into her own room, and lay her on the sofa. I will soon have the bed ready, everything is aired except sheets."

Dolly ran in and called Pyne to help her, but she could not get the old woman to understand what she wanted, perhaps because she herself was quite beyond speaking plainly.

"Jem, while we get her to bed, do you warm this soup. How lucky that I have some! I declare I think she is half starved."

When the soup was warm Dolly put a spoonful to the white lips. At first her mother did not attempt to take it, but after a little time she swallowed spoonful after spoonful eagerly. Her eyes opened, and with a look of painful eagerness she cried, "More, more!" When the soup was finished (Dolly gave her only a little cup full, though it was hard to resist the cry of "More") she dozed off into a very fitful and uneasy sleep.

That whole night did James and Dolly sit beside the bed, feeding her at intervals, and giving her a

little wine. She never seemed to recognise them in the least; but towards morning she fell into a good sound sleep, and the dreadful look of pain and terror had passed away from her poor white face.

"Jem, she will do well now, I think. I can rest here in the easy chair. O Jem, are you not glad that we finished the room before we got anything for the rest of the house? You must go to bed, dear, for you will have to go to the office, I suppose?"

"I don't think it will be open, but I may be of some use, so I shall go and see. You look so tired though. I wish you would rest instead of me."

"I am sure I could not sleep. O Jem, such a strange feeling as I got when I looked—just carelessly, by accident, as you may say, for I hardly knew that I looked—and saw who it was."

"It is well that you have such good sight. I could not have told you what they were all doing. Poor Mother, she looks half dead."

"She did; she looks better now. If she is not quite herself when she awakes you must go for Dr. Hedley, but I don't think we shall want him. She looks to me half starved. Oh, it makes me shiver to think of it."

"Dolly, you are worn out. Come out into the kitchen, dear heart, and make some tea, and let us eat something. I am really hungry, and so are you, if you only knew it."

Dolly got some breakfast ready in the trim kitchen, and though it was done only to please Jem, she soon found that he was right, for she felt much stronger when she had eaten.

"Now go to bed, dear Jem. See, it is only five, and I will call you at eight."

When eight o'clock came she told him that her mother was still asleep, but that she looked much better, and more like herself.

"You must come back as soon as you can though, for until she knows us, and has spoken, I cannot be easy about her. Besides, she may not have been alone, you know. Poor Papa! I wonder has he ventured to come? Yet if he were with her she would not be in such a wretched state. I almost think she must be alone."

"I think so. I'll come back soon; but had I not better get some brandy, or some really good wine, Dolly?"

"O yes. I'm glad you thought of it."

Jem departed, and Dolly took her needlework and sat beside her mother's bed to watch for her awaking. With what feelings of pride and joy she glanced round the really pretty room, where every article represented some self-denial and a good deal of hard work. How well it was that they had got it ready! how Mamma would like it! Should she light a tiny bit of fire? it looked so nice; but then the day was not cold, and the movement might wake the sleeper. How Agatha would like to hear—but, oh, that brought back the grief, almost forgotten in the absorbing interest of the night. Agatha was gone; no kind words of sympathy would she ever say again. Poor Dolly! she laid down her work and cried pitifully, till, like a child, she cried herself to sleep. Mrs. Pyne looked in presently, but mother and daughter were both asleep, and so the question she wanted to ask about dinner must remain unasked for a time.

Mrs. Dobbs was the first to awake. Nourishment

and quiet sleep had brought back her scattered senses, but she had hardly any remembrance of the events of the night, and not the least idea as to her present abode. She moaned feebly, and turned towards the light, but did not open her eyes.

"I wonder where I am," she muttered. "I am afraid to look. I remember I got faint and fell, I was so weak. Then some one fed me, so I am in some hospital or, more likely, in the workhouse. Oh, to think that I should come to that!"

Determined to know the worst at once, she opened her eyes and looked round. A small, but pretty room, with a latticed window through which peeped some late roses; a carpet, pretty flowered chintz furniture covering, crimson window curtains, a sofa, an easy-chair. Ah, who was that in the easy-chair? This was no workhouse; that was no hired nurse. Who was it? Not little Dolly; she was not so tall as this girl, her face was rounder, and she wore long curls; and yet it was Dolly after all. Mrs. Dobbs sat up and cried out wildly—

"Oh, Dolly, am I dreaming? Dolly, my child!"

Dolly opened her eyes. Yes, it was Dolly; there could be no doubt about it. It was no other than Dolly, who jumped up in a moment, seized her mother in her soft, warm arms, and rained kisses upon her face, her hands, her hair, crying with delight all the time—

"Mamma, you know me at last. Oh, dear Mamma, poor little darling Mammy," and a hundred other fond words.

"But you 're so thin and weak, Mamma—I must not go on like a fool. Lie down again, and let me

go, that I may get you some breakfast, and then you must tell us everything."

Before the little dainty tray was quite ready, Jem came back.

"The office is shut, Dolly. I called at the house to bring you word how they are. Mr. Barlow came into the hall to speak to me, and they are all well. He spoke so kindly of you, dear."

"Oh, I am glad you went. I have good news for you, Jem. Mamma knows me. Come in and see her. Carry this little kettle, dear, and I'll bring the tray."

"Why, is this Jem?" cried the weak voice. "What a fine, tall man he's grown. Dolly has grown too, and looks so glad to see her poor foolish mother."

"Glad to see you, Mamma! Why I'm not an ostrich, to care nothing for my mother. I believe it is the other way though; but never mind, I daresay they don't care for *any* one. You must have some breakfast before we ask a question."

Having eaten a good meal, Mrs. Dobbs seemed wonderfully better, and began to look about her.

"Where am I, Dolly?"

"In your *own* room, Mamma; in Jem's house. We furnished it for you, and no one ever used it until you were carried in last night."

"Jem's house? Then you have got on, James? You are doing well?"

"Very well, Mother, in a small way. We have plenty for you, as well as for ourselves; we have always expected you."

"Plenty! doing very well!" murmured Mrs.

Dobbs. "And this is Jem! and we always thought him the dull one."

"Well, Mother, I think you were right then. I'm no genius, and I'm not making a fortune, you know; but God has been very good to Dolly and me, and what we have we'll share with you."

"Mamma," said Dolly, "you look stronger now, and I must ask, I cannot wait any longer, where are they all—is there any one with you?"

"No, my dear, I came alone. Oh, Dolly, Dolly, such a story as it is to tell!"

"My father?" Jem said quickly.

"He is dead; we think he was lost coming over to join us. There was a ship lost when we had been there about a year, and there was a Mr. Thomas lost in her. Poor Fitz made every inquiry, and was satisfied that it was my poor Tom."

"And where is Fitz?"

"Oh, my dear, I've *altogether* lost sight of poor Fitz. Ah, my dear, handsome boy; and he was always kind. He would never have treated me as Harcourt did."

"Where did you lose him, Mamma?"

"It was not very long after he wrote to you; your answer came after he had left us. It was some business matter; I did not understand it, but he and Harcourt fought. Fitz said it was dishonest, and Harcourt and Mr. Murray insisted, and at last they offered him a sum of money to go away and break the partnership. He was rather glad, I think, for you know how clever he was; and there was a company of actors making a tour in South America, and he joined them. He is sure to be a famous

man some day. He wrote once or twice, but not lately."

"And the girls, Mamma?"

"Oh, poor Mirrie, she was going to be married, you know; and to such a *perfect* gentleman and so rich, and gave her the loveliest presents you *ever* saw. But the day before the wedding a lady came, not that she was a real lady either, but she said that she was his wife, and so she was; he couldn't deny it. Mirrie never held up her head again; she just pined away and died. Fitz was her favourite, you know; if he had been there it might have been different."

"Poor dear Mirrie! Oh, poor thing," cried Dolly, half sobbing. "And Belinda?—though I 'm getting afraid to ask."

"Belinda married a man who owns a great tract of country somewhere—I know there are buffaloes, but I never remember their queer names." (Mrs. Dobbs meant the names of the places, not of the buffaloes.) "We none of us liked him; he was a coarse, rude man, but Belinda said that after poor Mirrie she 'd had enough of gentlemen, and even though Mirrie was so ill she would not so much as wait. Mirrie said one day, 'If little Dolly was here she 'd nurse me.' And Mr. Low is not kind, I know. He won't let her write to me now."

"Mother, how did the business go on after Fitz left?" asked James.

"The business—Murray & Murray, as they called it? My dear, it ended very badly; that Mr. Murray was a *dreadful* man. He was indeed. They say it was all a cheat, and Mr. Murray was caught, and I daresay he is in prison still, but Harcourt managed

to get away. I'm afraid he would have left me behind, only he pretended he was taking me to pay poor Linda a visit, and got away before the failure was found out. He took me to New York, and there he gave me some money, and advised me to come to you; and he left me to find my way as best I could, and did not even give me enough money for my passage. I had to sell nearly all my clothes, and poor Tom's watch that I had kept so long. And when I got to Manchester, I found I had lost your letter, Dolly, with your address. Still I thought I should find you, because I remembered the shop Jem had been in at first, but they could tell me nothing, and were not very civil. All my money was gone, I was really starving, children. I was asking here and there in the shops, trying to find you—but it was well you found me, for I should soon have died of it."

"It was Dolly that found you, her eyes are so quick. But, Mother, why did you never write to us?"

"Well, indeed, Jem, when everything was going wrong with one after another, I was ashamed to write and tell you. But, oh! children, I will confess now, once for all, that you were right when you refused to come with us! There was a curse on that money, and you see the end of it."

"Dear Mamma," said Dolly, kissing her, "we 'll take such care of you, that you 'll forget all your sufferings, and Fitz will come to us some day, you 'll find; and we 'll write to Linda. Don't look so sad, Mamma, I must go now and get one of my dresses and alter it for you, until we can buy you some new things. And then you 'll get up and see what a

pretty house and garden you have come home to, and be introduced to Brisk and Mrs. Pyne."

Mrs. Dobbs was quite ready to do anything Dolly wished. All spirit seemed to have been frightened out of her, and she was very weak and frail. Very humble and quiet, too, and touched beyond measure at the sight of the room which had been prepared for her, and by the gentle care which surrounded her.

"And this is Jem, my dull boy," Dolly heard her mutter, when the story of their early struggles and their present comfort was told her. "And this for me! and I was never good to Jem," she said. "I was half-afraid of him and thought he would be no credit to us. And the others, that I *did* love and was proud of cared nothing for me. Poor Fitz was kind, but he left me; Harcourt cared only for himself. I wonder why James is so different."

"Shall I tell you why, Mamma?"

"Yes, my darling, if you can."

"Because dear old Granny used to speak to Jem and me, and from the first he loved to learn from her. Jem is so good! he is a true Christian, and so he tries to be like his Lord, loving, tender, forgiving, and ready to help. He never talks much; but, O Mamma, Jem *is* so good! As good, I think, as my dear Agatha."

"Your friend, of whom you were telling me; and you, Dolly, are you like Jem?"

"I try to be. I am not so good, nor nearly, but I think as he does, and I try to be good."

"I think you *are* good, my own darling. I have been a wicked woman, Dolly; you must teach me what that good woman taught you. For, oh, I see

now that I have been a careless, wicked, selfish woman."

Mrs. Dobbs was still so weak on the day appointed for Agatha's funeral, that Dolly could not leave her. Jem went alone, and came back quite overcome by the sight of his friend Mr. Handcock.

"He was so quiet, you know, Dolly, and when he saw me he smiled—and I can't forget his face when he smiled. He won't be parted from her long—he will soon follow her."

But Jem was mistaken. Mr. Handcock went about his work again, almost at once. He was graver and more silent than of old, but had still a pleasant word and smile for all. His health did not give way, as Jem had feared, and Jem had the happiness of being a comfort to him in many ways. There was no companion like silent, sympathising Jem, with his heart in his eyes, either for a long country walk, or a turn up and down the Beech Avenue. As to Jem, I think he would have died for this, his first friend.

"Jem," said Dolly one day (she had been questioning her mother during the morning, and now understood how things had happened better than in the first hurried telling of them), "do you know that if I had gone to San Francisco that time, when I was so silly about it, I should have arrived only a month or so before the quarrel with Fitz? Oh, dear Jem, what you saved me from!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW JEM AND DOLLY PARTED AT LAST.

VERY little change took place in the circumstances of the inhabitants of Lord Warrendale's lodge for some time after the date of my last chapter. Agatha's death had left Dolly free again, and her mother's arrival made it convenient that she should again undertake some law-copying, to make their little income sufficient for three people, one of them in very delicate health. Mrs. Dobbs was neither fanciful nor exacting, however, for the poor woman had learned a useful, if painful, lesson, and was most anxious to be no burthen on her two good children. She was very much altered in every way; in none more than this, that she shrank with evident horror from anything like show or display. She dressed as plainly as possible, and always in black; she was never heard to boast of her family or of her former riches, and she was always ready to put her hand to whatever work was going on. The word genteel was never heard from her lips, to Dolly's great delight. The only remains of her affectation was that she still called her elder children by their adopted names, but,

perhaps, she had forgotten that they had no right to them; Dolly certainly had forgotten it.

It was at about this time that Mr. Barlow, having first ascertained that he could certainly pass the necessary examination, offered to be at all the expense if James wished to become a solicitor, with the prospect of succeeding to the business and (probably) to Lord Warrendale's agency. James gladly accepted the offer, and all the necessary formalities were duly attended to.

Three very quiet years had thus passed. The only member of the family from whom they ever heard was Linda, and somehow they gathered from her letters that she was far from happy.

One day—a bright spring day—Jem was busy in the office. As of old, three clerks and a boy occupied the other seats, but Jem sat at the centre table, and ruled with authority as Mr. Gregson had ruled before him. Some one rang the street-door bell, and the office-boy tumbled off his high stool and clattered downstairs to open the door. He came up again with a grin upon his not over clean face, and said to Jem—

"Mr. Dobbs, it's a person wanting to see you on private business, he says. I bid him wait, for I didn't think you'd want to see him. He bid me say his name is Fitzgerald, and he's a hacter, and if you're the person he wants, you'll see him."

"Then I'm *not* the person he wants," said Jem, hardly looking up from his work. Some mistake, Price; tell him so."

Fitzgerald! Why did the name linger so oddly on his ear? He paused for a moment to consider this

question. Fitzgerald! Fitz! An actor. Was it not with actors that Fitz left San Francisco? Could it be Fitz? Price, who had dismissed the shabby man, who seemed so disappointed, was scandalised when Jem passed him on the stairs, rushing wildly down and out into the street without a hat. A few steps from the door a shabby man—oh, how shabby and how forlorn a creature!—stopped at the sound of Jem's cry and looked back. Jem was close behind him.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I was mistaken," said James. It was not Fitz: merry, handsome, well-dressed Fitz could never look like this sallow, disreputable-looking man—not even a very young man, Jem thought, and garments which had once been "knowing," but were now simply squalid. Yet the man held out his hand and smiled. Then Jem knew him. It was Fitz after all.

"Why, Jem, old fellow, don't you know me?"

"It is really you, then! O Fitz, come in here! My *dear* Fitz! Oh, what a state Dolly will be in, to be sure! Come home at once. No, I must tell Mr. Barlow, and then we 'll go gome."

"Home! that sounds pleasant, Jem." And Fitz waited while his brother rushed upstairs, explained to Mr. Barlow, got his hat, and rushed down again.

"I think they 'll go out of their minds at home," said James. "I 'm not sure myself that I 'm not dreaming. Why, Fitz, you 're lame! how comes that?"

"I fell through a trap, and spoiled my professional career," said Fitz, with a queer smile. "But I 'll tell you all that presently. Tell me, do you know anything of my mother?"

"Why, she 's at home with Dolly. You 'll see her in ten minutes. Here, cab! Get in, Fitz. You can't hurry, and I can't go slow, so we 'll drive home."

Fitz obeyed. Walking was evidently painful to him.

"Is my mother with you and Dolly?"

"Yes, she has lived with us for three years now."

Fitz leaned back and asked no more questions. Indeed it was not easy to hear what was said, the noise of the street was so great. Fitz kept glancing at his brother's plain but gentleman-like garments, and then at his own, feeling, if the truth must be told, a little ashamed at the contrast. They stopped at the great gate, and at the sound of the wheels out ran Dolly. Jem jumped out of the cab, and ran to the house to prepare his mother, for whom he rather dreaded any sudden shock.

"Why, Jem!" cried Dolly, "what *is* the matter? O—O Jem, come back! O how dare you—let me go!"

For Fitz had scrambled down in a violent hurry, and catching Dolly in his arms, was kissing her affectionately.

"Dolly! dear little Dolly—why I'm Fitz, your brother!"

"Fitz! not a bit of you! Let me look. Yes, you are. O welcome home, Fitz darling! O I'm so glad—so very glad!"

"This is something like a welcome!" Fitz said with tears in his eyes. Then Mrs. Dobbs came out in great excitement, and no one knew exactly how they all got into the house, nor indeed that they had done so, until Brisk, disgusted at the new-comer's

appearance, began a fierce demonstration, and fastened his teeth in the leg of Fitz's trousers.

"Come away, you bad dog," cried Dolly. "Don't you see it is Fitz?"

"Very wise dog, you mean," remarked Fitz. "He thinks me a suspicious character: and what am I but a vagabond?"

"Tell us all about yourself, Fitz. How did you find us out—what brought you to England—how are you getting on as an actor—where 's Harcourt?"

"Well, Dolly, you 've grown into a woman, and a good woman, I am sure, since I saw you, but you have not lost *all* your youthful habits. How many questions have you asked, all in one breath? However, they are easily answered. I know nothing of Harcourt—so much the better, I suspect, for there is no good to be known. How am I getting on as an actor? Not at all. I never got beyond being a 'walking gent,' if you know what that means: and since I met with an accident, and *can't* walk—only hobble—I have fallen even lower in the profession."

"But, my darling boy, how does it happen that you have not made a fortune on the stage? you that are so clever!"

"Ah, Mamma! so we all thought, and indeed I think *I have* some brains, but not as an actor. Those fellows I went off with first, helped me to spend my money, flattering me all the time. I was to be a second Kemble at least; but when the money was gone, they found out that they had made a mistake: and so did I."

"And what did you do, Fitz?"

"I stuck to the stage. I could earn bread and

cheese, and I like the life, the variety, and so forth. At last I wrote to Mamma, after a long interval, and got no answer, so I took fright. I went to Frisco, narrowly escaped being arrested in place of Harcourt, heard how things were, and guessed that Mamma would try to find you two. I found an English company who wanted a walking gent, and came home with them."

"And he came to me, to the office to-day," added Jem.

"Yes, I found you out after no end of trouble. And then the fellow wouldn't own me, and Dolly screamed when I hugged her."

"To be sure I did! I thought you were some madman. Are you still with that company?"

"No, they left Liverpool for Ireland a week ago, but the manager dismissed me. I'm no good now, you know. Well, Jem, now you know my history, and there," showing a small handful of silver, "is all I have in the world! You seem to have made a better thing of it. Tell me your history now."

"I've been very fortunate, and Dolly stuck to me through thick and thin. Make her tell you all about it. I must go back to the office for an hour or so, for I ran off leaving my work half done. But you 'll stay here, Fitz? Can you make room for him, Dolly?"

"O yes. Mamma will take me in and he shall have my room."

So Fitz stayed, and they fitted him out with respectable clothes, and nursed him through a bad attack of feverish rheumatism. And then he borrowed a small sum from James and went to London. James begged him to remain, promising to give him employ-

ment: but even now Fitz rebelled against "drudgery," and so off he went.

In a few months he came back, in much the same plight as before. His incurable lameness quite unfitted him for the stage, and he had tried various other modes of life with equally bad success. Jem was long-suffering, however, and again Fitz was nursed and petted, provided with an outfit, and unwillingly allowed to depart, to return after a time in the same way.

This happened several times, and it was a serious drain upon Jem's slender resources: and at last he rebelled. Fitz was changing, too, and not for the better, he felt—and beginning to shock innocent Dolly by some of his wild talk. Jem felt that it could not be right to let matters go on this way, and so, when once again Fitz made his appearance at the lodge, Jem went off to consult his constant adviser, Mr. Handcock. The curate listened to the story (of which he already knew a good deal) very attentively.

"You see," said Jem, "he is really a clever fellow: and yet I know he could not settle down to a life at a desk—like mine, you know. But I don't ask him to do that. I want him to try for a place as traveller for one of the great firms here. I have spoken about him to Stokes, of Holmes & Stokes, you know. I've obliged Stokes, and he would give Fitz a trial, but he won't hear of it. And I thought—I'm not good at talking—but if *you* would come and talk to him, and set it before him in a right way. He has a kind heart, and he's very fond of Dolly and my mother, but he has no principle, Mr. Handcock—that's the plain truth."

"I'll come. I will do my best, Jem. Sometimes a stranger has more influence with a man like your brother than his own people. At all events, you may be sure that I will do my best for your brother, old fellow: only don't be in a hurry, leave me to take my own way."

So Mr. Handcock came to the lodge and made himself very agreeable to all, but particularly to Fitz. Not a word on any serious subject did he say that evening, or for many another evening. Not until he had won Fitz's heart did he speak, and then he spoke with so much tact and kindness that Fitz was quite flattered by the interest taken in him. This being the story of James and Dolly, and being, moreover, a story very nearly finished, I must not tell you all that passed between these two. It is enough to say that Mr. Handcock did succeed in rousing Fitz's long dormant conscience, and in leading him—poor foolish fellow—to the only One Who can give peace to a conscience once roused. And after this, Fitz was willing enough to leave his wild, idle life, and work for his living in any honest way for which he was fit.

Fitz got a good situation, thanks to Jem, as traveller for Holmes & Stokes. He was, of course, absent for weeks together, but his home was at the lodge, and he seemed happy and in all respects altered and improved.

Some time after this, Dolly was busy at her law-copying one morning, and, as it happened, was quite alone. To her surprise (for he seldom came but in the evening) Mr. Handcock walked in. He seemed absent, and sat silently looking about him for some time.

"Jem will be home in an hour or so," said Dolly. "It is half-past two, and we dine at four, you know, so I hope you 'll wait to see him and have some dinner. Now I 'll call Mamma, for I have put away my writing."

"No, not yet, if you please. I knew I should find you alone. I want to tell you something."

"Nothing bad, I hope? Mrs. Barlow—I saw her yesterday?"

"She is quite well; I saw her this morning—you have been a great comfort to her. She is very fond of you."

"And I love her dearly. Well, then, what is your news, Mr. Handcock?"

"I have had an offer made me which I should like to accept. You know my lungs were not what they ought to be, once upon a time. I 've out-grown it, out-lived it, but still, as you know, I have to be careful. And I 've always been told that a few years in a mild, equable climate, would probably make me a perfectly healthy man. Well, the offer I speak of is, an Archdeaconry at the Cape. It is a very good thing in every way; plenty of work, plenty of variety, and a splendid climate. As to money, I should be better off at home in a few years, but I don't care about that, being well off already."

"O dear! and so you will go away," cried Dolly. "Well, if it is for your own good, and to *do* good, we must not grumble; but we shall miss you very much."

"I should miss you—*too* much. It depends on you whether I go or stay. I will go if you wish it."

"If *I* wish it! Why, Mr. Handcock, of course I wish you to do what is best for yourself."

"But I won't go alone, Miss Dobbs."

Dolly looked at him.

"I don't understand you a bit!" she said.

"I'm sure I am speaking plainly enough. You wish me to go, but if I do you must go too."

"I must!" and Dolly laughed.

She really did not understand him; it was neither affectation nor mock-modesty. She was beginning to realise that his absence would make a great blank in her life, but she had no idea that her absence would be a grief to him.

"I don't think I could do that," she went on, fancying that he was joking.

"Well, then, I shan't go," was his reply, and he looked at her over his spectacles with a laugh.

"Dolly!" he said, "you are the most simple-minded of women. I don't believe that you have a scrap of self-consciousness in your composition, and you are certainly not good at reading a riddle. So I must speak plainly. Will you be my wife, Dolly, and go with me to my new home? I love you truly, my dear, and I think I could make you love me."

Dolly had rather large eyes by nature, but the way she opened them at this made her look like nothing more than a young owl.

"I don't understand," she said, not believing that she had heard him rightly.

"Yes, you do, Dolly. Will you say 'Yes,' and make me happy?"

"No, I won't; no, you wouldn't," said Dolly, half crying. "When I remember——"

"She loved you, Dolly, and you loved her. It is a bond of union between us."

"But I don't believe it, and I couldn't leave Jem. I belong to Jem, and I could not leave him."

"May I speak to Jem about it?" said Mr. Handcock; but he got no answer, for Mrs. Dobbs came in at that inconvenient moment with a basket of beautiful pink fresh eggs (the hens being now her special care), and while she was displaying these, and descanting on the wonderful merits of the hens, Dolly made her escape, and Mr. Handcock soon afterwards went away.

He did not wait for Dolly's leave to speak to Jem; and that evening, when Mrs. Dobbs had gone to bed, Jem took the opportunity to have a talk with Dolly.

"Put away your writing, Dolly—I thought you were never to write in the evenings again!"

"I have just finished; you know you wanted this paper to be ready to-morrow, and I was interrupted in the morning. But, indeed, you are getting so rich now, Jem, that I may soon leave off copying."

"Somehow, Dolly," said Jem with a rather sad smile, "I think I shall have to look out for another copying clerk. I don't expect you 'll copy much more for me."

"What do you mean?"

Mr. Handcock came to me to-day at the office, and spoke to me about you."

"O Jem, weren't you surprised? but I bid him not go to you—at least I had not time to say that, but I did not give him leave. I hardly thought he was serious."

"Well—I was not surprised—and he was quite serious. He knows what you are, Dolly. He values

you as you deserve; and I, who know you so well, think him good enough for you; *even* for you, my darling."

"O I know he is good—but Jem, I belong to you. You don't want me to leave you? I told him I could not do it."

"But I want you to think about it, dear. He is so good, so loveable, so clever—his wife will be such a happy woman, and I want you to be a happy woman, Dolly. And though I shall miss you, and no one can ever be what you are to me, yet you know I have Mamma, and you know how good she is to me now; and she has become so strong and well that she is quite able to keep house, and get on comfortably. It is not like leaving me alone. You must not say 'no' on my account, dear. It would make me quite unhappy."

Never had silent Jem made such an oration.

"O Jem! all the years we've been everything to each other! How can we part?"

"You've been the best, dearest little sister in the world, and you'll be the best wife. I owe Handcock so much and love him so dearly that I am willing to give him the best thing I have, because it will make him happy and he has gone through so much sorrow."

"But you *can't* give me to him, unless I like to be given," remarked Dolly.

"No, but if you know that you could love him, I think you have no right to refuse him, Dolly. You could make him happy—and he has suffered so much."

"Does he *really* want me, Jem?"

"O indeed he does, my dear. And I think—well

—I told him to come here to-morrow, and try if you had no better answer for him than you gave him to-day."

Dolly argued the point much longer, and when arguments were exhausted, she cried heartily, but Jem saw how it would be, and the unselfish fellow rejoiced greatly. And when Mr. Handcock came next day, bringing a note from Mrs. Barlow to aid him in pleading his cause, Dolly took back her "no" and frankly said "yes."

Time has proved that Mr. Handcock chose well and wisely, though his grand relations were terribly disgusted at his marriage; for Dolly is as good a wife as any man could wish for. And she is a very happy woman too. Mr. Handcock — Archdeacon Handcock I ought to say—has become a perfectly healthy man, and the only ungratified wish of his wife's heart is to show her two pretty little girls to "Uncle Jem." And, as Archdeacon and Mrs. Handcock are said to be coming home for a well-earned holiday, even this wish will be granted her soon. And Jem, on his part, has to make Dolly acquainted with the future Mrs. Jem, a nice good girl, worthy to be his wife. Jem is a great man (in a small way, as he says himself), for Mr. Barlow has retired from business, and Jem fills his place. And Mrs. Dobbs is often heard to murmur—

"And we called Jem the dull boy!"

THE END.

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